

\$3.95

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY

Magazine
Issue #14

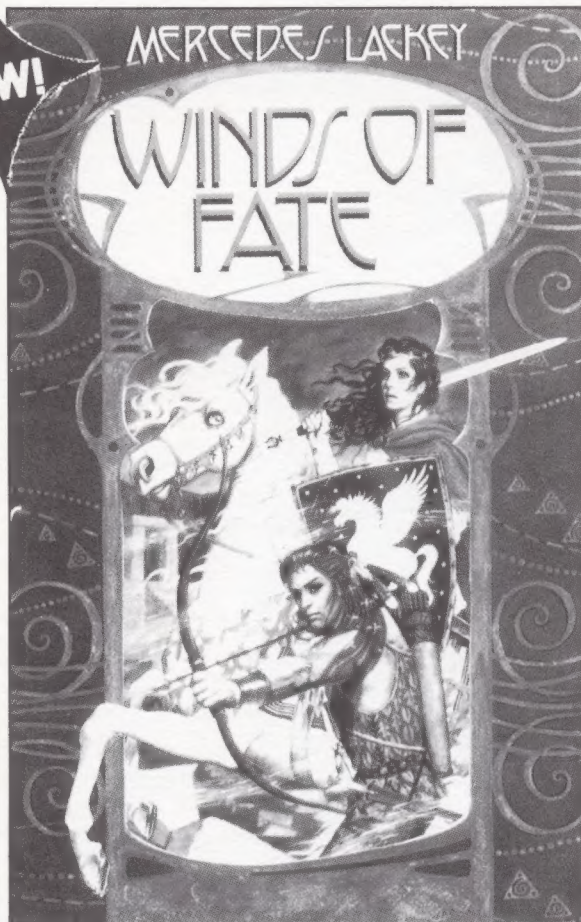
Dawn Albright
Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck
Kevin J. Anderson
Dana Kramer-Rolls
Bunnie Bessel



GAIL J. BUTLER
1991

A DAW HARDCOVER

Could Herald Elspeth, heir to Valdemar's throne,
save her kingdom
from conquest by
sorcery?



Book One of The Mage Winds

WINDS OF FATE

Mercedes Lackey

DAW Fantasy /Original
0-88677-489-6/\$18.95 (\$24.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds
of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

OCTOBER 1991

Best-selling fantasy author Mercedes Lackey first began ensorcelling readers with the publication of her *Heralds of Valdemar* trilogy, which brought to life the kingdom of Valdemar. This enchanted land is protected by the Heralds—men and women gifted with extraordinary mind powers and paired with wondrous Companions, horselike beings who know of the many perils and possibilities of magic. Only the Companions truly remember the long-ago age when high magic was lost to Valdemar as the last Herald-Mage gave his life to save the kingdom from destruction by dark sorceries.

Yet now the realm is at risk again, for Ancar of Hardorn will use every weapon at his command to conquer Valdemar. And it is Elspeth, Herald and heir to the throne, who must take up Ancar's challenge, abandoning her home to find a mentor who can awaken her untrained mage abilities. But even as Elspeth sets out in search of the forgotten magic that could prove to be Valdemar's best hope, others, too, are being caught up in a war against sorcerous evil. The Tayledras scout Darkwind is the first to stumble across the menace that is creeping forth from the uncleansed lands. And as sorcery begins to take its toll among his comrades, Darkwind may find himself forced to call upon powers he has sworn never to use again if he and his people are to survive the onslaught of an enemy able to wreak greater devastation with spells of destruction than with swords...

- Magnificent jacket art by Jody A. Lee
- Fully illustrated by artist Larry Dixon

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER
Marion Zimmer Bradley

MANAGING EDITOR
Rachel E. Holmen

DESIGN
Art Weller

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE
Raul Reyes
Jane Robinson
Lawrence Schimel

PROOFREADING
Gil Lamont
Debbie Notkin

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY

Magazine

Issue #14 – Fall 1991 – Vol. 4 No. 2

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

ISSN 0897-9286

Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.

P.O. Box 249

Berkeley, California 94701

(510) 601-9000

SUBMISSIONS:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage.

FANTASY Magazine, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words.

While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers at a special rate of \$3.50 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

SUBSCRIPTIONS and BACK ISSUES:

Individual subscriptions are \$14.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., \$20.00 in Canada, \$32.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are \$4.50 plus shipping. Shipping charges are \$1.00 per copy in U.S., \$2.00 in Canada, foreign \$6.50. Back issues (#4 sold out) \$4.95 each plus \$2.00 per order shipping in U.S.

ADVERTISING:

Rates available on request.

BOOKSELLERS and SCHOOLS:

Discounts available. For information, call (510) 601-9000 or write to us.

Contents copyright © 1991 by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.

Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA.

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

EDITORIAL

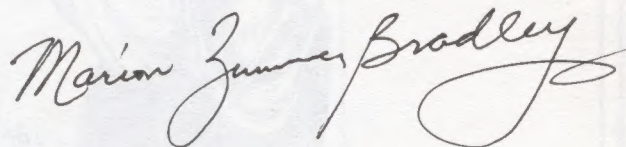
If nothing else, the news this week is calculated to give us intimations of mortality. You may have heard that in the last few days we've had a disastrous fire in the Berkeley hills. My mother and the other members of my family who live at Greyhaven took refuge here or with other houses on the Berkeley flats well out of the line of the fire. (Greyhaven survived, and everybody moved back in within two days.) BART — Bay Area Rapid Transit — was partly shut down for a while, and so I missed a performance of Ruddigore. But hundreds of people in the Bay Area lost everything they owned and are now awaiting disaster relief. For all of us here on the magazine staff, the fire missed us by a mile — literally — though there was one evening when we packed suitcases in case we should be evacuated. I didn't know what to pack, except the disks of the books I am working on. Most of my clothes were in the laundry and I couldn't even have begun to save my books.

We were lucky. Not being one of those people who believes we create our own reality, I won't be asking people why they "chose to manifest" a disaster. I get furious when some soppy New Age type asks me (casting her eyes to heaven) why I "chose to manifest diabetes". By me that's just another way of "blaming the victim".

However, by (choose one) dumb luck or the grace of some deity, all of us here are alive and kicking, and ready to continue our appointed labors.

Some years ago I read the biography of the great psychic Edgar Cayce. He was arrested for fortune telling and asked his guides, despairingly, why this had happened to him; they answered only "a little scouring is good for the soul." Well, I think, beginning with the Earthquake two years ago and now this, that we've had ours.

We're still working to bring you an ever better magazine — and we want to have it out by the weekend of DarkoverCon — mundanely known as Thanksgiving — but if we're not, at least you'll know why.



MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY Magazine

Issue 14

Fall 1991

Page 4



Page 8



COVER STORY

Black Ribbon

by Dawn Albright; art by Gail Butler

4

The Promise

by Diana M. McCabe; art by Alan Gutierrez

8

Frog Kiss

by Kevin J. Anderson; art by George Barr

14

The Tengu's Scroll

by Dana Kramer-Rolls; art by Alicia Austin

18

Page 24



Page 58



The Wuzzles	24
by Marion Zimmer Bradley; art by Hannah M.G. Shapero	
Dragon's Lair	28
by Stephanie Shaver and Ronald Pisano	
Heartleaf	31
by Susan Hanniford Crowley; art by Vincent Di Fate	
Stand By Me	36
by Glen and Connie Ten-Eyck; art by Rob Alexander	
The Frog Prince	40
by Marella Sands; art by Gus diZerega	
Twenty Peasants	46
by Barton Paul Levenson; art by Margaret Organ-Kean	
Witchcraft, Wicked Witchcraft	49
by Kate Hoppe; art by Shirley Jowise	
The Jewel	52
by L.G. Hunt; art by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk	
The Ogre-Troll Wars	55
by V.L. Heppner; art by Nicholas E. Jainschigg	
Guardian	58
by Bunnie Bessel; art by Bruce Jensen	

REGULAR FEATURES

<i>Marion Zimmer Bradley</i>	
Talks to Writers	29
The Perfect Cover Letter	
Results of the Cauldron	30
An Interview with Teresa Edgerton	32
by Sandra Brandenburg and Debora Hill	
Letters to the Editor	44
The Last Word	63
by Rachel E. Holmen	
The Cauldron	64

Black Ribbon



Artwork by Gail Butler

The nurse measured three drops of poison into the milk and then poured the milk into the first baby's bottle. She picked up the first baby, the twin wearing the black ribbon.

"Hush, sweetheart, hush," she said, as she fed the baby girl the poisoned milk. The baby made a face at first, like she wanted to spit the cloth nipple out, but then she tasted the milk and drank everything in the bowl. The woman gave the baby one of the last kisses she would ever feel and then she picked up the sister, the baby wearing the red ribbon, and fed her pure milk. The nurse wore no gloves then, but a few weeks later she couldn't touch the black-ribboned baby without protection.

Keriss and Keriss danced in their room in the middle of the afternoon. Keriss in the red ribbon wore the gown she would wear in the sitting room that evening, when gentlemen started to arrive at the house. Keriss in the black ribbon wore a mixture bizarre even for cosmopolitan Parsel — light leather breeches wrapped tight around her legs and tucked into her high boots, a riding shirt like the wild horse tribes to the east wore, silk gloves like a lady of the western courts, and a heavy veil that covered her face with only a thin slit to see through, like a southern barbarian. Her costume covered every inch of her skin.

"I saw him last night," the Keriss who was going to go downstairs said, after she had taught the other Keriss the new dance step. "He seemed nice."

That was the signal that lessons were over for the night. The Keriss in black stepped back and sat on her bed, and the Keriss in red retreated to the other side of the room. The free sister preferred to run from the quarantined sister as soon as allowed, but the older women liked for

them to talk. When the time came, Keriss in black had to be able to impersonate her sister, and she should know how she spoke. The plans had been made years before they were born.

"He seemed nice?" Keriss in black said. "That's not what I'd heard."

"When have you heard anything?" the other sister said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Why did you pick me and not my sister?" Keriss in black asked their nurse Maran one day after Keriss in red began to visit with the men in the sitting room. Keriss could hear her sister downstairs laughing, with all the other women. "Was it because I was older, did I look prettier or less pretty as a baby, what was it?"

"Oh, maybe because you were older, I suppose. We didn't think about it. It had to be one of you. You were the one I picked up." Maran put Keriss's glass down by her bed, a mug filled with a murky wine with an olive tinge to it. She blew the girl a kiss and left the room, locking it after her.

Keriss picked up the mug and held it to her mouth. She heard the music from downstairs, and she heard the sounds of dancing. She knew that dance too, one of the ones that her sister had taught her while wrapped in veils and gloves although Keriss was locked behind her heavy leather clothing. She listened for a moment more and then she spilled the wine across the floor. The herbs made a pattern against the red tiles that looked almost pretty. Keriss stared at it with her hand to her mouth. Her lips didn't touch her hand. At first she wanted to call her nurse to bring a second cup, but then she ran for rags to wipe up the mess and tried

to think of a story to explain the broken mug the next day. She wrapped the wine-soaked rags into a ball and put it into the bag where she placed her soiled napkins once a month for one of the women of the house to bury. No one would look to see that some were stained with wine and poison instead of blood.

When she finished, she went to her window and looked out at the alley below. Her window faced the back, but she could see lights from windows on other streets and she could listen to the music and imagine conversations and parties. Downstairs a piper forced his pipe to play dances instead of the weird, mournful wails it wanted to sing. The dances came out dangerous, maddening. Keriss put her arms around herself and shivered. She pulled off her embroidered shirt and rubbed her hands along her arms and breasts, wondering if other people's skin felt like her own.

In the morning the only signs that she hadn't taken her wine were the dead mouse on the floor of the room and the way her stomach lurched when she got out of bed. Her caretaker looked at the mouse with a surprised eye — she knew the signs of this poison — but then she thought of the supply of herb in the kitchen and ignored it. She told Keriss that she had a flu, accepted that she had knocked her glass off the table in the night, and left her breakfast. Keriss wondered if her food might taste better without the leftover taste of poison in her mouth, but when she had three bites of it, the contents of her stomach came rushing back up.

The chills and headache and the nausea got worse through the day, so when Maran came back with a glass of murky olive wine, she could only raise her gloved hands feebly to try to keep the glass from her lips. The wine slipped down her

by
Dawn Albright

throat, and with the familiar bitter taste she felt a touch of relief from her headache. The next morning she felt well again, and when her nightly potion came, she held it in her hand for only a few moments before she drank it all.

The house did a thriving business with the Grandarian merchants who had occupied their country just as surely as other countries had been occupied with armies. Every year it did more business with the local populace too, as the local men slowly forgot the time when the house had been a temple and the women in it priestesses.

The men downstairs complained that the Keriss they knew wasn't available to the public. She had many admirers. The twins weren't the prettiest girls in the house, not at that house, although there were others where they would have been. Keriss owed at least some of her popularity to her unavailability. When the men who spent their evenings talking to her and dancing with her discovered that they would take another girl upstairs to bed, it seemed only natural to them that there was a good reason for her to be too valuable for the common trade. They speculated that she was a royal bastard, with the light hair and fair coloring that many members of the royal house had inherited from past marriages of state with western kingdoms. Rumors of her royal birth spread. One day, the younger prince himself came to the house and danced with Keriss. When the prince was refused Keriss's company, the rumor was confirmed. What reason would these shrewd businesswomen have for angering the prince if Keriss wasn't a close relative, even a sister? Who could they be saving Keriss for?

Soon after that, the Grandarian ambassador came to the house to see the royal bastard, and he took Keriss upstairs.

First, they had to make sure that sixteen years had been enough time to make the other Keriss ready. They brought a stray dog up to her and told her to take off her gloves and stroke it. She did so gingerly, afraid that the starved-looking dog might bite her hand.

"Let it sniff you first," one of the women said, seeing her hesitation.

The dog sniffed her hand and didn't find anything wrong with the scent. Its tongue snaked out to touch her hand, as nervously as Keriss had previously touched the dog. Keriss jumped at its warmth. She hadn't thought that the dogs

she had seen from her window would be so warm. She brought her hand up to scratch its ears and enjoyed the feel of the fur. The dog leaned against her leg and Keriss dropped to the floor next to it to rub her hands through its coat and rub its belly when it rolled over to present it to her.

She looked up to ask Maran if she could have some old meat or milk to give to the dog and saw their faces watching her, watching the dog. She pulled her hands away from the dog and stood up, alarmed. The dog followed her, pushing its nose against her leather pants.

"That's not enough to kill it, is it?"

"You know it is," her sister said. "Don't play innocent with us now."

Keriss tried to answer her, but couldn't. She couldn't think of anything that would make her sound innocent. She sat on the floor away from the other women while the dog started to whine and vomit.

Later, Maran touched her hair gently with a thickly gloved hand. Keriss expected words of comfort for the dog's death that she could refuse to hear, but instead the older woman only sighed. "Your sister is no longer a virgin, darling. If you're going to finish this properly, then the ambassador can't be able to tell you apart by that difference."

Keriss said nothing, and after a few moments, the older woman continued. "There's a young man downstairs. He's a drunkard, of good family, but he has nothing left but debts now. He owes every house in the district, including us, but he's handsome and pleasant."

Keriss still said nothing and her nurse tried again. "A man is harder to poison than a dog, Keriss. Before we send you to the ambassador we have to be sure." Finally the older woman stood up and brushed her skirts off. "I'll send him up. He's a good choice for you, dear. He's quite nice, and no one will miss him."

Later, when they dragged him from her bed and threw his body in the river, Maran sat by Keriss's bed with tears in her eyes, waiting for the girl to need comfort. Maran sat with her through the sunrise and most of the morning, but Keriss sat silently with her needles and yarn and didn't seem disturbed by anything but the smell of vomit that the cleaning hadn't entirely dispelled. When noon approached, she forced a smile at her caretaker and patted her hand with her glove. Maran smiled back and left her alone. Keriss never told her that she felt the death of the dog much more than the death of the young man.

The ambassador visited his Keriss of-

ten. Maran often wondered out loud if it was the girl that he liked or the idea of screwing a member of the royal family. Maran had no respect for the ambassador. Keriss in black often wondered how her sister felt about him, if she felt the same repugnance Keriss in black had felt for the young man dumped in the river. The sister in red had always been quiet when she visited her sister in quarantine, but now their visits looked and sounded like prayer hour. They both stared at the floor and said nothing.

"Are you ready for this?" Maran said. The nightly doses of wine were stronger now, and Maran avoided the touch of even Keriss's clothes. Keriss wore her gowns over and over now, with none of the servants coming to wash them. Keriss had to dump her own chamber pot, pouring it out her window into the back alley and hoping that no cat or dog would investigate. Keriss wondered if she would kill the weeds between the stones in the road.

Maran herself led Keriss out of the building where she had been brought as a baby. She saw the lower rooms for the first time in her life, in passing as she tiptoed down the back stairway — she thought that the artwork and satins couldn't compare to what she had imagined, and felt sad at losing her image of the golds and reds she had long thought belonged there. The smell of garbage and human waste that was unpleasant in her room choked her in the alley. As she slipped out of the house, she could hear her sister laughing again, as she heard her laugh so many nights.

She followed Maran through the back alleys. No one bothered them. Keriss didn't know that Maran never left the house without a weapon. This time, Keriss was the weapon.

Soon enough, they reached the ambassador's quarters. Maran stopped well away from the door. Keriss turned to see tears in her eyes. "Goodbye, my baby." The older woman bent forward impulsively and, brushing aside Keriss's veil, she kissed the girl on her forehead and ran back down the alley.

"Maran, don't," she gasped, well after the woman was already out of sight. She stared down the alley, even started after her, but she didn't want to see her nurse vomiting in the streets. She stared back at the door. Behind it was the ambassador.

Before she had gathered her wits, a servant opened the door. Had Maran

rung a bell? Keriss couldn't remember.

"Lady Keriss?" the servant said. "I wasn't told His Excellency had sent for you."

In that moment, Keriss appreciated the wisdom that had led the older sisters to name both twins by the same name. She was too befuddled to answer to a name that wasn't hers. "He... didn't. Will he see me? I..." and then she didn't know what else to say. They had had a plan, briefed her on what to say, but it was all destroyed by Maran's last kiss.

Something in her face caused the man to pull her inside. "Are you well, Lady? I'll tell His Excellency that you want him. Can I bring you something?" Keriss saw the look of kindness on his flat brown face, saw his hand steadying her arm, and she became aware of the sweat coating her skin. Oh Gods, she thought, he's touching me. She jerked her arm away and regretted the look that flitted across his face, but she didn't regret it as much as the sweat that threatened to soak through her gown to his hand.

"I'll tell him," the man said with the kindness gone from his voice. Keriss tried to remember what she was supposed to say. A plot, they had told her. She had come to warn him about a plot.

She expected the servant to come back, to bring her to the ambassador. Instead, the ambassador came himself.

"Keriss, what is this? Do you have good reason to come uninvited to my house?"

"It's a festival day," she whispered. "Back in the old times, before we worshipped the true god, this was a festival day in the old temple. The old women are dancing with knives and they're killing doves in the back rooms."

He drew in his breath. "Did they frighten you, dear?"



Artwork by Gail Butler

She smiled at her hands. "Maybe I was a little frightened. But there's going to be a great celebration tonight. I thought perhaps you might like to see it." She thought that the maker of laws would very much like to see an illegal ceremony, and the hungry look on his face answered her. He would.

"Come along then," she said.

"Why do you wear gloves on such a hot night?"

"It's for tonight. I'll take them off later."

At the public house, she asked him to wait outside. "I want to make sure they're done in the back room. They won't be happy to see you if they're still sacrificing."

Inside, she slipped through the house she had lived in all her life and only seen

once, until she found the staircase that led to her attic. She found her sister, brushing her hair in the mirror.

"Hello, sister," Keriss said and took off her gloves.

When her sister was dead she traded dresses with her, a green silk in a western cut that left her arms and shoulders bare. She hadn't realized how hot she had been in her own enveloping shroud until she took it off. She brushed her hair with her sister's brush before she went downstairs to her ambassador. She had always been able to see that her twin was beautiful, but this was the first night that she felt beautiful herself.

She went downstairs to where the ambassador waited, not bothering to hide herself from the other women of the house. She squeezed one woman's shoulder as she passed and kissed another's cheek. She passed through the common room where the music was starting and found the ambassador waiting for her impatiently. She held out one of her bare hands to him. "The festival is just starting. Come on. I want to

dance with everyone tonight."

DAWN ALBRIGHT recently moved to the Boston area, where she is active in a writers' group. "Black Ribbon" is her first professional sale. When she sold us the story, she wrote that she was expecting a baby, and that the baby and the magazine were in a race to see which would be first. Well, the baby won: Alice Rose Albright was born Sept. 17, 1991.

GAIL BUTLER is well-known in the Northwest as an artist and a fan. She is an ex-military-wife, musician, barber, and an antique restorer as well as an expert at drawing figures and animals. In her spare time she is a volunteer Jewish mother to northwest art fandom.



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

THE PROMISE

In the days when the great sea dragons still plunged and howled in the wild dark icy waters of the bitter North Sea, Nikora, once prince of Vlessaholm, walked the restless shores of the island of his exile. Ceaselessly he walked, though the sun burnt his once fair skin and the wind whipped stinging sand and biting spray into his face and eyes. Stumbling over the rocky pathless shores, his haunted eyes stared out to sea, and his thin and haggard face was lined in concentration. He was listening.

Trembling with exhaustion, Nikora stopped, pushed long dark hair matted with salt and sand away from his face and turned his gaze inland to the castle that had been his summer palace. Once renowned for its comforts and pleasures, it was still a place of exquisite beauty, its colored spires and ornate gardens set like a jewel among the jagged pale grey cliffs that towered high above the crashing green-grey sea. Gilded now by the setting sun, the palace blazed in golden brilliance, but its beauty was a torment to Nikora, for it was empty.

Nikora turned back to the sea with a look of desolation in his eyes. The rolling of the surf pounded always in his ears; the smell of salt and fish and water stung his senses used to perfumed baths, exotic spices and delicately flavored foods. But these hardships were as nothing. He was alone here, left to die here, and the relentless loneliness was the one torture he could not endure.

His hollow eyes swept over the sea, but he saw nothing, for every sense in him was focused into listening. He had heard a voice, the heart-stopping sound of a voice singing. Many times he had heard it now, and it was this that he searched for without rest, this which drove him, half-dead, half-mad, to drag himself onward over the narrow, rocky beaches that rimmed the island below the steep stone cliffs. Did he hear it now?

Nikora ran toward the sound, as he had each time before, his heart pounding in his throat in fear and hope, the sand and his weariness dragging at each step. He ran near the edge of the sea, through tall vaulted arches and massive pillars carved from the rock by the relentless surf. He climbed over the remains of the ancient cliffs, hills of shifting stones, some larger than himself, where brightly colored crabs scuttled away from him, dropping out of sight into dark tidal pools,

and where one misstep could mean a dangerous fall. He listened intently as he ran, and still the wind carried bits of sound to him, sound that could only be singing.

Then, suddenly, the cliffs turned sharply across the beach to plunge into the sea. Nikora found his way blocked by a massive rock wall that rose fifty feet above him. There was no possible way around. He stood looking up, breathing hard, one hand on the wall, his other hand gripping his right side where it ached from running. The singing was clearer here, but it came from beyond the wall.

The wall was sheer, rising straight up, but pocked with ridges and indentations. Nikora reached up and found a crevice that he could grip with his fingers. Heedless of pain, he began to climb, pulling himself up little by little. Soon the muscles began to cramp in his arms and legs, his fingers and toes were scraped and bleeding.

Twilight fell quickly as he climbed, shrouding the rock in dim light. Nikora felt for holds his eyes could no longer see. Without the sun, the wind blew cold across his sweat-soaked body, and he began to shiver. Still, he clung to the wall and climbed.

Frantic and panting, at last he reached the top and pulled himself onto a wide ledge. But there was nothing, no one, to be seen. Only the wind sang here in the failing darkness. Cold and lifeless, the wind moaned over the sea and rocks.

by
Diana M. McCabe

"No," whispered Nikora. "No!" he screamed. He stood up upon the summit of that great wall of stone and screamed his furious disappointment, his cracked voice loud and shrill in the face of the wind, then lost in the crashing sea-spray.

"Damn you, Gaelij! Damn your warped and twisted mind! You should have killed me! You destroyed my kingdom, but that wasn't enough. You must have never-ending suffering to satisfy your evil hunger. I curse you!" he howled. "From the icy bowels of hell to the fiery arch of heaven I curse you, Gaelij! I curse you!"

He covered his face with his blood-smeared hands and wept, his breathing wracked with painful sobs. Dizziness came over him and he crumpled where he stood. Lying on top of the cold stone ledge, while darkness closed over him, he wept until at last he fell into a profound sleep of weariness and despair, and hoped to never wake.

But, in the moments before dawn, he woke, suddenly, every sense alert. He had heard something. Now he heard it again. It came to him over the morning mists, rising on the sun's first streamers of light, drawing him, calling him. It was close by.

With straining eyes and ears Nikora searched his surroundings. He was standing on one end of a towering formation of stone cliffs that rose straight up out of the deep ocean to form a semi-circular inlet. It was as if the sea had taken a monstrous bite out of the land here.

Nikora ran to the edge of the cliff and looked down. In several places, the cliff face had crumbled, leaving steep inclines of loose stones that ran down to a ledge just above the level of the sea. Far below, sitting among the flat stone slabs that littered the ledge, he saw her.

Sitting on the wet grey rocks just above the spray, she was singing to the sea. She sang a song of calling; he could feel the power of her voice upon him as an almost physical force, pulling, magnetic, irresistible.

Nikora lowered himself over the edge of the cliff just above one of the collapsed inclines and dropped. He slid and fell as he hit the hill of treacherously shifting stones, but caught himself. He looked down at the girl.

Her back was turned to him, she sang out to sea, and he could see only her hair that fell down her bare back. It was the color of moonlight on water and upon it was a sparkling net of droplets from the spray. She lifted her arms, bare and shin-

ing wet in the dawning sunlight, in a gesture of supplication, and her song reached a crescendo of such longing that Nikora held tightly to the rocks to keep from falling.

Then, with a roar, the waters in the small cove spouted upwards and broke, surging aside, as a great sea dragon rose from the deep. In the early sunlight, its scales glittered like a million bright gems, sapphire, amethyst, and emerald. Its rows of dagger-sharp teeth shone diamond bright within ruby jaws as the sea poured off its side in great rivers of foam.

Nikora clung to the rocks, paralyzed with fear, but the girl held out her arms and the beast came and laid its huge head in her lap. She gently stroked its shining face, and laid her own face against it.

Fearfully, Nikora finished the climb down, his gaze riveted over his shoulder at the wondrous spectacle of the girl holding the deadly beast. At the bottom, he stood with his back braced against the cliff face to support his shaking legs.

She began to sing again, this time a song of love. Her voice reverberated in the small grove with strange power and beauty. Nikora forgot all fear as his heart soared with her song, and broke, and soared again. All of love was in this song. All the joy of truest love joined and the pain of parting poured forth. Nikora trembled where he stood and wiped tears away with his long black hair.

When the song ended, the dragon sighed and slid back into the deep. The girl sat silent, gazing after it. In a moment, Nikora realized she too might disappear, leaving him alone again.

He must speak to her. He crept nearer and suddenly saw she had the tail of a fish. He knew then he dared not see her face. He tried to turn away before he spoke, but he could not tear his gaze away from her shining hair.

"Don't go," he whispered, his voice hoarse. "Please..."

The mermaid froze. She did not turn, but neither did she flee.

"I am alone here," whispered Nikora. "Please don't go away. I can't bear it anymore. I am almost mad from the loneliness. Please, I beg you. Stay."

The mermaid bowed her head. "I too know what it is to long for another," she said. Her voice was as sweet and sad as her song had been.

"The dragon?" asked Nikora gently.

The mermaid sighed, her head bowing even further. "We are cursed."

"Tell me," said Nikora. "Your voice is

so beautiful... The most beautiful thing I have ever heard." He crept nearer, staying behind her so that her face was hidden behind her silvery hair.

"My name is Cechelle," she began in a low voice. "The dragon was my betrothed, Seylond. A year ago, I was captured by an evil sorcerer."

Nikora stiffened with hatred. "And the name of this sorcerer...?"

"...was Gaelij," whispered Cechelle. Nikora's hands tightened into fists at the sound of that vile name.

"He tried to force me..." She stopped and shuddered. "He wanted me to be his wife. But I refused and resisted him because I loved Seylond, and at last, in anger, he cursed us both. Now Seylond is changed to a sea dragon, doomed to live where the dragons feed in the icy waters of the North where I cannot go. And I," she paused and drew a ragged breath, "if I ever look upon any man, shall be turned to stone."

Nikora stood, hatred running hot within him. "I, too, have suffered for Gaelij's perverted pleasure. It is he who has trapped me here to die from insanity." For a long moment only the crashing of the sea sounded around them as Nikora struggled against his burning rage and tried to think. "Can nothing end your evil enchantment then?" he asked finally.

"There may be one way," answered Cechelle sadly. "Gaelij himself taunted me with the knowledge, so there may be truth in it. But even if it were truth, it would be impossible." She shook her head and her moonlight hair shimmered down her back. "If the man I look at can, of his own free will, throw my stone self back into the sea, the spell will be broken and Seylond and I will be free."

Nikora groaned inwardly, remembering tales he had heard. It was said that any mortal man who looked upon the face of a mermaid would be bound to her heart and soul. He would never be able to give her up though she was turned to stone. But surely, thought Nikora, since she must look at him, he could close his eyes...

He crept a step closer to the mermaid. "Cechelle," he said, his voice shaking, "if I promise to do this thing for you, will you stay here? If I could only hear your voice, talk to you sometimes, so I would not go mad."

Again, Cechelle shook her head. "I could not stay. Though I would owe you thanks beyond measure, Seylond and I must flee far from this place to escape Gaelij's



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

wrath. There could be no safety for me here."

Nikora stood in silence and stared bitterly out to sea. How could he not help her...how could he not go mad when he had to let her go? He saw Cechelle's body trembling, heard her whisper, "I am sorry." She was weeping.

Nikora went down on one knee behind her, wishing that he dared to touch her, to comfort her. He reached out his hand as if to touch her shoulder, but did not. "Don't cry," he said gently, his heart aching more for her pain than his own. "I promise I will help you. Perhaps it will

give my heart peace to know you are happy...Will you sing to me one last time before it is done, so that I can remember your voice in my loneliness?"

"I will gladly sing for you," answered Cechelle, her voice breaking. "But how can you end this enchantment?"

"When you turn to look at me, I will close my eyes, and, blind, I will give you back to the sea."

Cechelle took a shuddering breath. "Perhaps that may work. But whether it does or not, you might pay for helping me with your life..."

"Yes!" said Nikora. "Let me meet that

vile worm, Gaelij. I would rather die than live in this unending loneliness, and if I die, I hope to take him with me."

Cechelle straightened and raised her head. "So let it be done," she said. She began to sing, softly at first, then with gaining strength.

She sang old songs from the ages of beginning, of the deep warm secret places in the sea, of the sweet seductive voice of the moon which woos the waters, of haunting mysteries lost forever to the ancient mists that prowl upon the face of the ocean floor, and of undersea places and people of beauty unbroken.

Nikora still knelt behind her, transfixed by the power of her voice. It seemed to surround and engulf him. His head bowed down upon his knee and his eyes filled with tears as her song filled him with unspeakable joy. He longed for it to never end.

But when at last it was ended, Nikora spoke with awe, "I will hear your voice always in my heart and it will comfort me. I thank you, for you have surely saved me from insanity."

Cechelle turned toward him, her face averted and still hidden behind her silver hair. She held out her hand to him. "It is I who must thank you," she said, "for what you are about to do. And I pray that we may all be free."

Nikora took her hand and held it gently. "Goodbye," he whispered. He bent and kissed her hand, and sadly released her. He stood, moving to the very edge of the rocky shelf next to the mermaid, and closed his eyes. "Now let this thing be done," he said. "I am ready."

Suddenly, driven by the winds that raced across the island or by some sinister unseen power, a great wave rose and fell crashing around Nikora's feet. In the same instant that Cechelle turned to look at him, Nikora's eyes flew open to save his balance against the raging force of the water.

For one brief moment their eyes met, and in that breath of time, Nikora saw in Cechelle's face and eyes the eternal depth and beauty of the living seas. Beauty beyond imagining met his gaze for a timeless instant, and then there was only grey stone and silence.

Nikora stood for a second, shocked to the core of his being. Then his face twisted with horror and he fell to his knees before the figure of the mermaid, grey and still as the rocks she sat upon. Sobbing, he cupped his hands around her face. "You are so beautiful," he cried. "More beautiful even than your voice."

He put his arms around her and lifted her, cradling her against his chest. Love illuminated his face, then anguish. He kissed her face, her lips of stone still warm. Tenderly he stroked her hair and laid his head upon her breast. How could he give her up?...And yet he must. He had promised.

He held her out over the sea to give her up, but his arms would not let her go. Her beauty held him without mercy. His loneliness compelled him to hold her forever. But his promise bound him to set her free.

Tortured, Nikora stood at the edge of the sea, his arms wrapped tightly around the stone sea maiden, struggling, his mind tearing apart, splintering like broken glass. He cried out in torment, and the blankness of insanity engulfed him.

For three days Nikora sat in the gardens of his palace, gazing at the statue that stood in the center of one of the marble fountains there. It was a new statue, and how strange, he thought, he could not remember how it came there.

He marveled endlessly at the detail and the perfection of its beauty. Truly, it seemed sometimes as if it were a living thing, as if at any moment it would shake off the stillness that held it and reach out to him. So he sat beside it, hour after hour, watching and waiting.

Now, it was the eyes that held him. They seemed to speak to him of things, terrible things he did not want to know, things that lay just beyond the reach of his memory. But cold fear crept into his mind with a numbing blankness and he could remember nothing. Instead, he gently reached out to touch the slender perfect hand and kiss the lovely haunting face.

Then, from far below, from the foot of the cliffs before the sea, he heard a sound. Could it be a voice? Could it be the voice of the one he heard singing so often in his mind?

Leaping up, Nikora raced across the garden to the wall that overlooked the rocky cliffs. Directly below, a huge sea dragon had dragged itself half out of the water to lie exposed upon the beach. It lifted its head as Nikora watched and cried out in a voice laden with sorrow, a piercing wail that fell to a low chilling moan.

A look of horror passed over Nikora's face. The hair on his neck and arms stood up. His legs trembled so that he could hardly stand, and fear turned his stomach. Deep within him was the undeni-

able feeling that he must know something about this, that he did know why a great dragon of the icy North lay keening in grief below him. But the blackness of fear shadowed his mind, and he could only cower, filled with dread, his shaking hands pressed over his ears and his contorted face hidden against the wall.

Behind him, across the garden, one, then two, small teardrops trickled down the face of the stone mermaid and silently fell into the pool below.

Then the sound of evil laughter fell like a slap across the face of the garden. It filled the air, echoing back and forth across the cliffs and shattering the windows in the castle. Nikora rose from where he had crouched in shame and turned his face, livid with rage, to the sky. With the force of a thunderclap, his broken mind snapped back together and he remembered. He remembered Gaelij, the mermaid, and his promise. The cruel laughter stung his mind, but he remembered everything.

With every ounce of his will, Nikora walked to the stone mermaid and lifted her in his arms. The shrill laughter tore at him, but he walked on. Across the garden, down the carved stone stairs carved into the cliff, down to the sea, carrying Cechelle to set her free. He took no notice of how his heart and mind were breaking; pain became insignificant to him. He must do this or die. Gaelij must never win.

At the edge of the sea, there was no sign of the dragon. Nikora walked straight into the water until it reached his knees, then gently lowered Cechelle into the rolling surf. Terrible pain seared his chest as he released her, and he staggered, gasping for breath, back to the beach.

He fell on his knees, panting, clutching his heart with one hand, a look of bitter hatred on his face. Even in his pain he had seen that it had all been a lie; Cechelle was still a statue standing in the surf, not a mermaid swimming green and silver and free.

With effort, Nikora looked up. Above him the sky swirled and blackened, churning with angry storm clouds. The sea was dark, rising in fierce breakers that smashed against the rocks. There was no more laughter, only the loud furious hissing of the wind whipping across sea and stone.

Nikora forced himself to stand. A great black clot of storm was rushing across the sky toward him. Nikora summoned all his strength. He would die here, he

knew, but if he could somehow find a way to destroy Gaelij, he would die as the Prince of Vlessaholm had been born to be.

The black clot came upon him with a howl and hung above the sea before him. The cloud parted and Gaelij stood within it, sparks of lightning crackling around him. He raised his staff and pointed it at Nikora.

Nikora lifted his chin and met his enemy. He had no plan, all was clearly hopeless. But still he stood, proud and defiant in the face of death. He was a Prince.

Gaelij threw back his head and laughed. The evil sound darkened and poisoned the air. "So, my little prince, you thought you could win a victory over me." He swung his staff and pointed to Nikora's left. "Look again."

Nikora looked where he pointed and his heart twisted. Rocking in the surf was the stone mermaid, her face now disfigured, her body bent in some nameless unvoiced suffering.

Shaking with rage, Nikora turned back to face Gaelij. "Kill me!" he screamed. "Do what you want with me, but let her go!"

Gaelij laughed again and sparks flashed and burned around him with an acrid smell. "Oh yes," he laughed, his eyes burning into Nikora with fiery menace. "I intend to kill you. I grow weary of this little game. But do not think that death will set you free. I have the power to bind you here... Yes, even in death.... And she is mine forever."

Gaelij swung his staff in a wide arc over his head and aimed at Nikora. Brilliant red and orange lightning streaked from the staff and surrounded Nikora in a crackling fiery cloud of sparks. Nikora screamed and fell.

In that same instant, the water below Gaelij's cloud burst skyward with a mighty roar, as the sea dragon shot from the sea in a tremendous leap, long-toothed jaws gaping wide with murderous intent.

The dragon seized Gaelij with one horrible snap of teeth and bone. All time and sound seemed to stop as the great beast fell in a slow grisly arc back toward the water, until it hit the surface and carried Gaelij's severed body under with a thundering splash.

Slowly, the evil blackness faded and vanished from the sky, to be replaced by streams of clean sparkling sunlight. The sea was blue and clear, softly lapping at the shore. A peaceful hush settled over all.

Gentle hands helped lift Cechelle from the water. She opened her eyes and saw Seylond bending over her. With a cry of joy and relief, she clung to his neck, her eyes full of tears as she met his gaze.

On the beach, Nikora moaned once, then lay still. "We must help him," she whispered. Seylond nodded.

Cechelle pulled herself across the beach to Nikora's side. She turned her face away for a moment, for his body was badly burned. Then she bent and kissed his forehead, and closed his eyes with a tender touch.

"He is dead," she whispered to Seylond, who came up beside her. "But his soul still lies trapped within him, I can feel it."

"Gaelij meant to trap him here forever. Sing to him, Cechelle. Tell him that he is free."

Cechelle took Nikora's lifeless hand and held it to her cheek. Then she lifted her voice and sang. Out over all the island and far out to sea, her voice rang clear and golden in the newborn sunlight.

She sang of the air, of the boundless sky, of winds that blow from all the ends

of the earth and never rest, of the dazzling colors that shimmer and dance upon the highest cloud-strewn paths where winged spirits walk, and of the stars that laugh and sing upon the very veils of heaven. She sang of wings of power, of soaring flight, and of freedom.

And as she sang, a mist began to grow and hover over the still form of Nikora. Pale and chill it was, at first, but it grew in shape and warmth. Skyward it rose, and Cechelle's song wove patterns of sunlight and rainbow around it as it shaped itself into wings and head and feathered tail.

As the song ended, a great white sea eagle circled twice above Cechelle and Seylond. Its grace and beauty were magnificent to behold. Turning in air on its wide white wings, the eagle's eyes searched out to sea as if it heard something from afar. With a final turn, it soared out over the sea and away.

Cechelle wiped tears from her face. She laid Nikora's hands across his breast, and gazed after the eagle. Seylond put his arms around her. "He is free," he said.

She smiled and nodded. "And look," she said, pointing far out by the horizon

where a group of eagles rode the winds in a dizzying dance. "Now he is no longer alone."

20

DIANA M. McCABE is 36, married, and has a seven-year-old daughter. She has lived in Nashville for most of her life, except for twelve years spent in Virginia after graduating from college.

Currently, she is attending the Nashville school of Art. Until four months ago, she was also employed part-time in a bookstore.

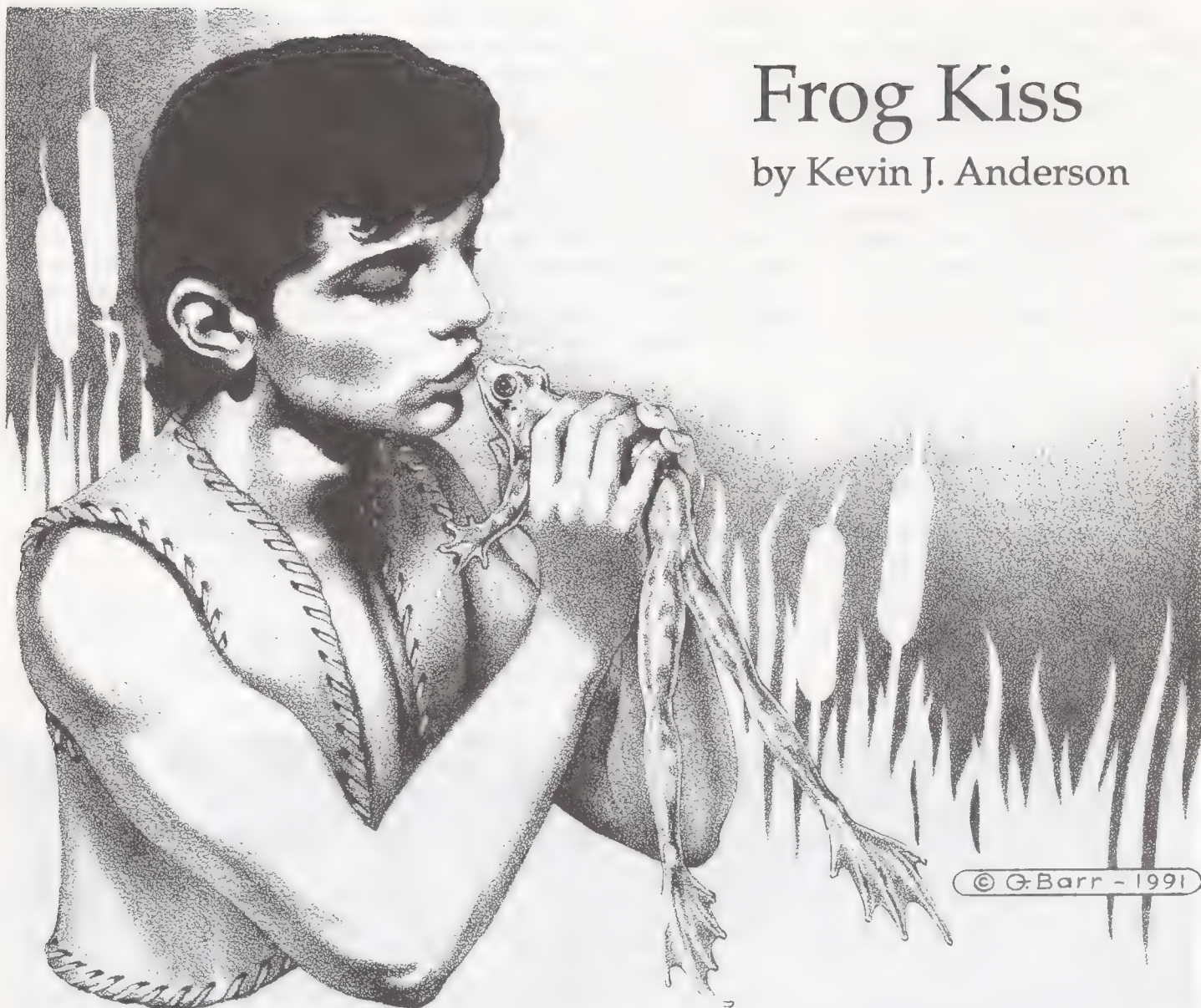
Her other interests include sewing, designing patchwork, music (both listening and composing), and collecting books (especially collections of short stories and science fiction and fantasy).

She has been writing stories for many years but only recently began to work seriously towards publication. "The Promise" was her first submission and her first sale.

ALAN GUTIERREZ lives in Sedona, AZ, with his wife and young daughter, and is a well-known cover artist. His illustration for "Sunrise" by Leslie Ann Miller in issue #12 drew praise from readers.



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez



Artwork by George Barr

Frog Kiss

by Kevin J. Anderson

He had gotten used to it by now. The frog felt cold and slimy against his lips, with a taste like brackish water, mud, and old compost. But Keric gave the frog a dutiful smack on its mouth, hoping that it wouldn't suddenly turn into the fat old king, who had also been enchanted along with the more desirable members of the royal family.

But the frog just looked at him, squirmed, and then urinated on Keric's palm. Nothing. Again. Keric tossed the creature through the trees and marsh grass. He listened to it plop in a puddle. Another one tried and failed.

Around him, thousands of frogs croaked in the dense swamp, loud enough to drown out the whine of mosquitoes, the constant dripping of water, and the occasional belch of a crocodile.

Sweat and dirty water ran in streaks

from his brown hair down his cheeks, but avoided the frog slime around his mouth. He had caught and tested more than three dozen frogs already, but it would be years before he could find them all — and that was only if any members of the frog-cursed royal family still remained alive in the deep swamps!

A crocodile splashed somewhere out in the network of cypress roots and branches. Somehow Keric couldn't imagine the brittle old Queen Mother deigning to eat flies, not even if they were served to her by someone else.

When the evil wizard Cosimor had taken over the kingdom less than a year before, he had followed the traditional path of sorcerous usurpers by capturing the entire royal family and transforming them into frogs. Cosimor then turned

them loose in the sprawling, infected swamps of Dermith.

Cosimor had intended to tax his new kingdom to its death, drive the subjects into slavery, and generally keep himself amused. But less than three weeks later the wizard had died choking on a fishbone — no vengeful curse, that; simply poor cooking. Now the kingdom had been left without any rulers, not even the incompetent but somehow endearing royal family.

Keric, who lived in a hut on the fringes of the Dermith swamps, trapping muskrats and selling the fur in the noisy walled town, had decided to try and find the royal family in its marshy exile. If he could free at least one of them with a kiss, then he could count on a substantial reward. A palace of his own, perhaps? Gold coins stacked as high as an oak tree?

Fine clothes? He pulled at his dripping, mud-soaked rags. Yes, fine clothes first. And then perhaps marriage to one of the princesses?

Keric spat drying slime from his lips. First he had to catch the right frog — and they all looked alike.

He slumped down on a rotting log covered with moss and put his head in his hands. Across from him in the piled undergrowth sat a bloated old bullfrog under a drooping fern. Plainly visible on the frog's back were three equally-spaced dark blotches.

Just like the supposed birthmark carried by every member of the royal family!

Was this the old king then? The fat duchess, the king's sister? It didn't matter to Kerik — the frog sat right in front of his eyes! It had taken him too long to see what was right in front of his face.

He didn't hesitate. Kerik shifted his body forward and then lunged, splaying out his mud-caked fingers. He skidded through a spiderweb, needle-thin fronds, and dead leaves, but the bullfrog squirted away from him. Kerik scrambled and grabbed again.

He didn't see the strange girl until she leapt out from the bushes in front of the bullfrog, opened the mouth of a squirming sack, and swept the frog inside. The bullfrog made a croak of alarm, but then the girl spun the sack shut. "Got him!" she said, giggling. Then she sprinted away through the underbrush, leaving only disturbed willow branches behind her.

"Hey!" Kerik shouted and scrambled to his feet. He ran after her, flinging branches out of the way. He splashed through puddles of standing water, squished on sodden grass islands, and ducked his head in buzzing clouds of mosquitoes. All around, the other frogs continued their song. "That one was mine!"

"Not any more!" he heard her voice from the side, in a different direction from where she had disappeared. He looked in time to see her running barefoot down a path only she could see. Barefoot!

Kerik ran after her. He found himself panting and sweating. He had grown up around these swamps. He considered himself an exceptional woodsman in even the deepest parts of the morass. He could outrun and out-hunt anyone he had ever known. But this girl kept going at a pace he could not hope to match. Kerik stumbled, missed solid footing, and splashed scummy water all over himself.

"Wait!" he shouted.

"If you'd look over here, you'd have a better chance of seeing me!" She laughed again.

He whirled to see her across a mucky pool, not twenty feet from him. Without thinking — since he was wet and filthy anyway — he left the path and charged across the water. "Give me my frog!"

Kerik tried to run with both feet, but each step became more difficult as the ooze sucked at his boots. He had to get the bullfrog with three spots. He *knew* it was somebody from the royal family. The girl probably didn't know what she had. Maybe she wanted to eat it!

Kerik sloshed onward, but before he had gone halfway across the pool, he felt the muck dragging him down. He sank to his waist, then found he could not take another step. He continued to submerge in the ooze. "Oh no!"

From the spreading cypress tree over his head, he heard the girl's voice. "You should be more careful out here in the swamps. Plenty of dangerous things out here. Crocodiles, water moccasin snakes, milt spiders bigger than your hand, poisonous plants." Kerik looked up to see her sitting on a branch, holding onto the frog sack with one hand and munching on a dripping fruit in the other. "You really have to watch out for quicksand. That's especially bad."

"Would you help me out of this?" He looked at her. He had sunk up to his armpits and felt the cold muck seeping into his pores. The mud crept to the tops of his shoulders. Kerik had to lift his head to keep his chin out of the ooze. "Please?"

"I don't know. You were chasing me." She finished her fruit and tossed the pit down. It splashed beside him.

"I'll tell you what you've got in that sack of yours."

"It's frogs."

"No, if you'll just let me kiss one of them I'll show you something magic!" He had to talk rapidly now. The quicksand had reached his lips.

"Oh, you mean *that*! Sure, I've got the whole royal family here." She reached in and pulled out a frog, this one sleek and small. It also had the three identical splotches. "You don't think you were the only one to get the idea about finding the frogs in the swamp, do you?"

Actually, Kerik *had* thought he was the only one to think of it. Once again, the obvious was staring him in the face.

"But you were going about it all wrong," the girl continued. "You kept trying to kiss them out here in the swamp.



Artwork by George Barr



Artwork by George Barr

Tell me, just what would you have done if the frail old Queen Mother had appeared? Or one of the dainty princesses who'd squeal at the sight of a beetle? How would you get them back to civilization? Makes more sense just to carry the frogs in a sack, return to town, and *then* change them all back. The reward would still be the same, maybe even more for saving them the journey."

Keric had to lean his head back to keep his nose and mouth above the surface of the quicksand. *"Will you please help me now, and give me advice later?"*

She shrugged. "You haven't asked me the right question yet."

"What question?"

"Ask me what my name is! I'm not going to risk my life to rescue a total stranger."

"What's your name? Tell me quick."

"I am Raffin. Pleased to meet you." She paused. "And your name?"

"I'm Keric! Help!"

She tossed down a vine. Keric grabbed the slick surface of the vine with his mucky hands. He managed to haul himself forward, toward the near edge of the pool. He heaved himself out onto the soggy ground and shivered. He had lost his left boot, but he had no intention of going back to get it.

When he looked up at the tree, Raffin was gone, and the frogs with her.

After dark, when Keric remained cold and clammy but unable to light a fire, he saw an orange light flickering through the tangled branches. He followed it to Raffin's fire, then crept close to where he could see, limping with only one boot.

She sat humming to herself and holding four sticks splayed in the flames. Little strips of meat had been skewered on the wood and sizzled in the light. The

bound bundle of royal frogs sat beside her. "Come closer and sit down, Keric. You're making enough noise at being quiet."

Angry, Keric came out of his hiding place and strode into her firelight. Finally, he sighed and shook his head. "I thought I was good in the swamps, moving silently, always knowing my way. I can't believe I'm being so clumsy around you."

Raffin shrugged. "You *are* good. The best I've seen. But I'm better."

She had washed most of the grime from her face, arms, and hands before preparing her food. Her long pale hair must once have been blond but now had taken on the color of fallen leaves and dry grass. Her eyes looked startlingly blue within the camouflage of her appearance.

Keric didn't want to imagine what he looked like himself.

Raffin took one of the sticks out of the fire and blew on the sizzling strips of meat. "Frog legs, filleted." At his shocked expression, she laughed. "Don't worry, they're just normal frogs. Would you like some?"

Keric swallowed. "I haven't eaten anything all day."

"Say please."

"Please. Uh, I mean, Raffin, may I please have some?"

"Of course. You're my guest. I saved your life. Do you think I'd refuse a simple request like that?"

He took the stick she offered and ate the crispy meat right off the bark so he wouldn't have to touch it with his dirty fingers. "What are you doing out here all alone in the swamps?"

"I live out here. I can take care of myself."

Keric could believe that. He guessed

she was only a couple years older than himself.

"I don't mind company once in a while, though." Suddenly, Raffin appeared shy to him. "Just listen to those night sounds, all the frogs and the humming insects. Why would anyone want to live in a smelly old town?"

Keric frowned and ate the last piece of meat. "Then why are you trying so hard to get the royal frogs?"

"Because you are. I've watched you for days. It's been fun. Besides, can't I dream about getting a prince of my own?"

They talked for much longer after that, but Keric could get no better explanation from her. He felt the weariness from the day sapping his strength, making him drowsy. He interrupted what she was saying. "Raffin, I am going to sleep."

He saw her smile as he let his eyes drift shut. "Make yourself at home."

When Keric cracked his eyes open again an hour later, his body begged him to just keep sleeping. But he couldn't. He had something important to do.

Raffin had stayed beside the fire, which now burned low and smoky, but still worked to drive the mosquitoes away. She lay curled up on the ground, her cheek pillowed on her scrawny arms. She looked very peaceful and vulnerable. Keric frowned, but then he thought of palaces and princesses and fine clothes.

The fire popped as two logs sagged, and Keric used the noise to cover his own movements as he crept to his feet. She had left the sack that contained the royal frog-family unguarded on the other side of the camp. He shook his head, wondering why she had made it so easy for him.

Keric picked up the sack and slipped out of the firelight, starting to run as soon as he got out under the moonlit trees. He tried to keep himself from laughing.

"Keric!" she shouted behind him.

He stopped trying to be silent. The marsh grass whipped around him as he picked up speed. Willow branches snapped at his eyes. He splashed through puddles and flailed his hands at large, flapping night insects.

"Keric, come back!"

He didn't answer her, but started to chuckle. He could make it out of the swamp to his hut. He would go immediately into the walled town and kiss all the frogs, even the old Queen Mother, and bring them back before Raffin could catch up to him.

He used all his forest skills to weave his path. He couldn't hear her following, but then he doubted if he would. She was too good for that.

Keric looked behind him as he ran, seeking some sign of her. Raffin impressed him with her knowledge of the swamps. She might be able to teach him many things. He decided he would share his royal reward with her anyway, once he got it, but for now he wanted to succeed on his own, to impress on her that his own survival abilities weren't so trivial either.

He tripped on the tail of the first crocodile and could not stop himself until he had stumbled into a cluster of the beasts. Once again, he had been looking in the wrong place and missed what was right in front of him.

The crocodiles hissed and belched at him. Keric cried out. He could count at least seven of them, startled out of their torpor and suddenly confronted with something worth eating. An old bull scuttled toward him, looking as large as a warship. It opened its mouth so wide that Keric felt he could have walked inside without ducking his head.

He turned and scrambled for a way out. Hissing and snapping their enormous jaws, the crocodiles moved in. The old bull lunged, Keric leaped back, caught his heel on the long body of one of the smaller reptiles, and sprawled backward. The smaller crocodile chomped at him. Keric dropped his sack of royal frogs.

He scrambled to his hands and knees, looking for an escape. The moonlight made everything dim and confusing. He thought he saw a flashing orange light behind the sketchy web of cypress roots, but he concentrated only on the nightmare of wide, fang-filled jaws.

Raffin appeared and struck the snout of the nearest crocodile with her roaring torch. "Get away from him!" The beast hissed and grunted as it scuttled back-

ward. Keric blinked his eyes in amazement. In her other hand, Raffin held a pointed stick that she jabbed at the other crocodiles.

The beasts backed away. The enormous bull stood his ground and let out a deep growl from somewhere at the bottom of his abdomen.

Keric crawled to his feet, too stunned and frightened to be much help.

Raffin faced the bull's charge and shoved her torch at her attacker. The crocodile hissed and snapped at her, but she was quick with the end of her torch, touching the burning end to the soft tissue inside the reptilian mouth. Keric heard the sizzle of burning meat.

With a defeated roar, the bull backed away and then, as if in a final gesture of frustration and spite, he lashed out with his long snout and snapped up the tied sack of royal frogs. The frogs made a combined sound like someone stepping on a goose. The giant crocodile crunched down with his jaws, chomped again, then swallowed. After a satisfied grunt, the crocodile crawled out of the clearing and splashed into the water.

"I told you to be careful out in the swamps," Raffin said to Keric. "Do I have to watch out for you all the time?"

Keric sat stunned. "They're all gone! In one gulp, the whole royal family!" He shook his head. "I never meant for that to happen."

Raffin took hold of his hand and pulled him to his feet. "The kingdom will do fine without them. They weren't particularly worth rescuing." She stared at him, but he continued to sulk. "Hey, it was fun while it lasted."

"No, I meant my reward. The gold, the fine clothes, the palace—"

"And what would you do with all that

stuff?" She looked at him, then tugged at his old, mud-caked tunic. "Fine clothes? Are you seeking what you really want, or just what you think you're *supposed* to want? What other people tell you to want isn't always right for you."

Keric lowered his head, then sighed deeply. He looked at himself and realized she was right. "If I had a palace I suppose I'd just track mud in it all the time."

Raffin giggled. "It's not so bad out here, you know."

"But what about my princess?"

Raffin flicked her hair behind her shoulders and looked angry for a moment, then spoke in a very shy voice. "You could stay in the swamps." She paused. "With me."

Keric looked up at her and listened to the frogs and the night insects. One of these days he was going to learn to notice the things right in front of him.

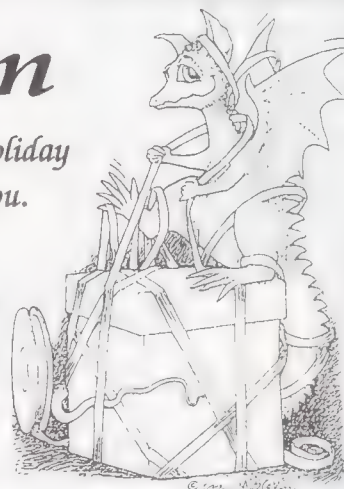
KEVIN J. ANDERSON has sold ten novels and over a hundred short stories and articles. His first novel, *RESURRECTION, INC.*, was a final nominee for the Bram Stoker Award. Forthcoming are two dark-fantasy novels written with Kristine Kathryn Rusch. He is a part-time technical writer for Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. He is owned by two cats, loves hiking and camping, brews his own beer at home, and is fascinated by everything.

GEORGE BARR made his first professional art sale in 1960. He lives in San Jose, CA, and has been providing illustrations for *FANTASY Magazine* since its first issue. He won the Hugo as Best Fan artist in 1968 and has been nominated in both Fan Artist and Professional Artist categories.

Imagination

... the Greatest Gift of All! And this Holiday Season we have it all wrapped up for you.

Delight those you care about with a gift subscription to Marion Zimmer Bradley's **FANTASY Magazine**. For just \$14.00 (until January 1, 1992, when it goes up to \$16.00) they'll receive a hand-printed card announcing the gift from you, and a year (four issues) of enjoyment of the finest flights in fantasy from the most talented writers in the genre. Order today!





The wisps of fog drifted around Kesami, caressing her with frosty fingers and hiding the last blue-gray view of Mount Kurama. She let out a sigh as she rose from the rough granite slab, luxuriating in its grittiness. A bare willow branch shivered in the chill air, brushing her face as she stood.

Her voice sang out,
*Immutable as Mt. Kurama,
 the garden stone
 Is split by the willow root.
 Spring comes.*

But she doubted she would be here to see it. She could feel the presence of the brooding mountain looming behind her

even though it was lost to sight. Resting her hand on the hilt of her long sword, she returned down the garden path with measured steps. Perhaps there would be time for another hour of practice before supper was ready. Perhaps she could practice through supper. The rice would go farther that way.

"Honored lady, honored lady." Kesami could see the servant girl materialize like a ghost in the gray mist. The maid ran with hobbled steps toward her as she waged a hopeless battle to keep her kimono decently around her ankles, her wooden clogs clapping on the path stones and her long hair streaming back. Kesami was reminded of a round little pony she had been given as a girl. She wanted to laugh at the sight made even more comical by the bright blaze of pink camellias printed on the maid's kimono, not out of cruelty, but out of pleasure at the youthful sincerity and exuberance of the child. But she could not. Kesami was her father's heir, and when he died, mistress of the house and daimyo of the estate.

Melancholic heaviness filled the young samurai again as the girl fumbled for the appropriate courteous gesture. It is even harder on the women than it is on the men, she thought ruefully, but said with gentle patience, "Yes, Kiku, what is it?"

"The generals are here. They have brought... brought," the girl's voice quivered, and she burst into tears, "your father."

Dry-eyed, Kesami accepted the not unexpected news. "How is his lady wife?"

Artwork by Alicia Austin

©AUSTIN 1991

she asked. This was as close as Kesami could come to calling Ichiyo mother. After Kesami's mother Mizue had died in the winter fever those many years ago, her father had remarried. Kesami's mother had been pure warrior, encouraging her daughter to train in the arts. Mizue herself had taken part in the siege on her grandfather's castle, driving back horsemen with her spear. And she had sat behind the screen when her husband held war council, and he had never been heedless of her advice.

But Ichiyo was an "accomplished" woman, lovely, charming, artistic, who had done her best to "train" Kesami. Her

"There is nothing to forgive, old friend of my father's. If anyone should ask for forgiveness, it is I. I should have been there with him." But they all knew that she had been forbidden to ride out with them. Heirs had to be protected. "But that is not pertinent. What is the situation? How close is the enemy? Will we receive help from the neighboring lords?"

The body was removed, and Kesami ordered rice and tea for the battle worn veterans. Clan wars had been a way of life, but a decade of peace had softened most of the feudal lords into a gentle prosperity. But Iga Tozaemon had gotten greedy and attacked Kesami's father's

dies. She knelt politely at the screen door and entered quietly. Ichiyo's tears dug cruel crevices in her ever-perfect white rice powder makeup, feeding her grief as they flowed past the red gash of painted lips into her mouth, her fashionably blackened teeth sentinels of death. Kesami's shock at the sight of the ever lovely Ichiyo ravaged by widowhood melted into compassion for the woman. But her pity was short-lived as Ichiyo turned and rose, lunging at Kesami like a madwoman, whose reddened eyes and contorted face peered, oni-like, from flapping and disheveled silk sleeves.

"Now what will you do? Will your

The Tengu's Scroll

by Dana Kramer-Rolls

lessons had not taken. As Kesami walked the endless path to her father's body, she knew that her grief would be only one of her burdens.

The thin reedy cries of grieving women reached her ears before she reached the house. As she slipped off her clogs and entered the house, the half dozen old men who stood around the body, already arguing, stepped back to allow her to join them. This was the moment. She knew it. They knew it. She locked eyes with the oldest among them, General Torigami. It only lasted two heartbeats. He bowed, and the rest followed suit. But everybody knew that the issue was not settled, just postponed. Kesami felt so small and young, and self-conscious in her men's clothes. Her voice sounded empty and far-away as she snapped, "Have the priests been called? Have the arrangements been made?"

A scrawny man with crow's eyes answered with an oily accusation, "No, Lady. We were waiting for you."

"I am here, and I so order it," she spat out using the hard sibillance which her father had used with recalcitrant retainers. Crow-eyes bowed, hiding his smoldering resentment, and left to do her bidding.

Kesami knelt by her father's body. She examined his wounds. It had been a clean fight. Against overwhelming odds.

"Lady," General Torigami said gently, "we were too late to save him, but we were not too late to protect his body from shame. Forgive me."

lands. Rice field after rice field, village by village had been stripped from the Omoto clan. And now Omoto Issai was dead leaving only a girl heir.

The general rolled out the map of the battle onto the grass matted floor. "See, Lady, here is the valley where Iga's army marches," he lectured, beating out a staccato with his war fan as he spoke. "This is where your father died. After that, our men rallied and drove them back to here, and here, by the river. They are holding that position, probably to wait for more arrows and provisions."

"And reinforcements," her step-mother's brother added sternly. He was a brilliant swordsman who was practically worshiped by many of the younger samurai who studied with him, all the more so for his cold-hearted discipline. Kesami looked away from the hate in his eyes.

"Then we must attack before they are reinforced," she said, firmly.

"Against a fortified position?" her step-uncle asked sarcastically. Some of the other men smirked.

"Would you rather wait for them in the tea house?" she snapped back, but she knew it was a useless victory. She had no plan, and if she did not lead them now, her life and honor and family name were forfeit.

"They will not move again tonight," the general said neutrally. "We have time for strategy in the morning."

As she padded down the hall to her room, she could hear the now-muffled weeping of her step-mother and her la-

selfishness kill us all?" Ichiyo shrieked. Her shrieking accusations burned into Kesami's head. "We must surrender to Iga," the tirade pounded on, "or we must all kill ourselves. We cannot win. If you fight him, we will all die. You are the only heir. Commit suicide, and he will be satisfied and release us."

A clammy fear struck at Kesami's heart, and she rushed from the room, and out of the house into the cold silent night. Ichiyo was right. There was no hope, and she endangered them all. How could she lead them? What did she know that would command respect? And her enemy was no girl-child passing for a samurai.

Grabbing a pair of grass sandals from the porch, she quickly and quietly slipped over the garden wall and into the woods. Wandering aimlessly, she finally found herself at the foot of the mountain road. An eerie silver mist swirled around her feet and snaked up over her body, forming a protective cloak as she climbed into the black shadowy trees which lurked like ogres by the roadside.

The sky had brightened to a pre-dawn haze when Kesami finally collapsed by a stream which gushed from a rocky crevice. When she awoke the sun was still low in the east, glowing like an ashy coal through the icy mist. Kesami's feet throbbed and her legs ached, but not so much as her spirit did. She dragged herself to the stream and plunged her face into the shockingly cold water. When she drank deeply, the water was so sweet it made her want to cry.

Then she saw a shadow move suddenly, and she sprang to her feet, her pain forgotten. Her sword whispered a deadly *sshhh* as she slid it out and cut at the enemy. But she saw no one. Perhaps it was a deer, or a fox, she thought. But she did not sheath her sword. There, again, she saw motion, and she spun around, thrusting at the movement.

"There, now! Easy, easy!"

Perched on a rock out of range of her blade, a creature the size of a small boy fluttered the wings on its shoulders to keep its balance as it spoke. Its beak-like nose and little hands, folded in a sinister parody of a priest, sent a chill through Kesami.

"So the samurai Omoto Kesami, last of her name, has come to visit this humble one."

Kesami froze with fear as she recognized the creature. It was a mountain goblin, a tengu. She cautiously and politely drew her sword back to her side, but pointedly did not sheath it, and bowed slightly as she said, "Noble one, accept my humble apology if I disturbed you." But she was not thrilled that so powerful and untrustworthy a creature knew her name.

She started to back down the road, but the creature flew up and around her, forcing her to turn around and around like a child in a game. "Do not leave me, Omoto Kesami. Where will you go? Back to your stepmother and her brother? Perhaps he would be your second if you wish to commit suicide. I'm sure he would not turn down such an honor." It did not hide its sarcasm.

Feelings swirled through her like the fog had swirled around her. She forced herself to be calm, but the tengu had cut her deeply. The goblin went on, relentlessly, as it flapped around and around her. "But surely I must not keep you. Your generals are waiting. But you need not hurry," it added, carelessly. "Your enemy won't move until mid-day. After all, they do not need to hurry, eh?" it finished, hovering in place in front of her and fixing her with its piercing eyes.

"What do you want?" she shouted, instantly regretting the bite in her voice.

"What do I want?" it repeated, mocking her. "I would rather ask 'What do you want?'" Then it flew up in the air, growing in size until it cast a giant shadow over her. When it spoke again, its voice had the power of thunder. "Do you not shame your father's name with your rudeness? And your mother's?" Kesami nearly

fell to her knees with fear. But the creature swept down, shrinking again to the boy-sized bird with the small chirping voice.

"You need not fear me, Omoto Kesami. I only wish to help you."

Her heart was still pounding from the shock of seeing the huge and fearful beast, and her sword hilt shook in her clammy hand. "What can you do for me?" she asked weakly, filled again with helplessness and shame.

"Come, girl, sit with me and have tea. I have watched you for a long time. I like your spirit. Oh, you are not as great a swordsman as your step-uncle, but you have courage, and I like that. What if you returned to the generals with a plan which would defeat your enemy, then what would happen?" he asked, with the kind patience of a priest instructing a child.

"If the men were to follow me and I won the battle," she began dispiritedly, "I suppose I would be declared legitimate heir, and I could carry on the name and honor of the house."

"And..." the tengu urged.

"And, I guess I would be a true samurai, and I could manage the lands," she went on, her voice becoming more excited and vibrant, "and the farmers wouldn't be starving and taxed to death under a cruel daimyo. And..."

"Enough, enough," the tengu shrieked, hopping up and down comically, "I do not need to hear your whole life." It grinned at her and poured her more tea. "And if I helped you attain this victory..."

Kesami looked up at the creature, sharply. The tea and the vision of victory had awakened her spirit. "Yes, noble one, and if you help me attain the victory, what do you want?"

"So little a thing. I wish you to worship me. No, wait, this is not so terrible. Do you not honor the kami, the gods? And your ancestors? And the buddhas? And you do know how powerful I really am..." it added menacingly.

"What do I get for this bargain?" she asked cautiously. "This," it shouted triumphantly, whipping a scroll out of thin air, "a secret school of strategy. It will make you the greatest general in the Imperial Realm. You can have what you wish. The emperor himself will seek you out. Think of it."

A creeping fear filled her. It was everything she could have ever wished for. Why then was her mouth as dry as clay? She wanted to run, but she maintained her control and bowed before the creature. "Noble one, I beg you to forgive this

humble one's foolishness, but I must consider this honor."

"Certainly. Come back to this place before noon and tell me what you have decided." With this it disappeared, leaving only a shrieking laugh vibrating in the air.

Kesami ran down the path to the foot of the mountain, elated and confused, happy and afraid. She looked at the sun for bearing, but it was no later than when she had awakened on the mountain path. A shiver ran up her back. Indecision swirled through her mind like a mist. She did not see how she could accept this obligation to this creature with honor. But could she refuse it, if that meant she could not perform her duty to her family and retainers? Could she live with either the shame of honor and failed duty, or duty and flawed honor? She had to decide, she had to decide. The phrase echoed in her bones as her sandals slapped along the road. But how? Who could she go to for advice? The general? How could he tell her to turn down such a chance? How could he tell his daimyo to submit to any power but the emperor, the gods, or the buddhas? And maybe not the last two? Her step-mother and uncle? Not hardly.

This was foolish. Of course she would accept. She turned to go back up the mountain when she saw in her mind the looming figure with the thunderous voice. And she remembered the mad priests who people had said were indebted to goblins. But her name? Her family? Did she not owe them victory, at whatever cost?

She found that she had stopped in the road, paralyzed with fear and confusion. She looked around and saw that she was near the shrine where the family graveyard lay. She gathered a few dried grasses into a simple bouquet and crossed the field to the neat rows of memorial stones. She would not wake her father, who was too newly dead to disturb. Besides, she didn't wish to trouble him with her indecision. But her mother's stone lay nearby. She clapped her hands, calling the spirit of her mother, and bowed, laying the spray of grasses before the stone.

"Mother, please guide me. A powerful tengu has offered me power if I worship it. What shall I do?" she prayed, but in the silence of the field all she heard was the occasional chirp of insects and the rustle of wind playing across the grass. Then she saw the image of her mother, Mizue, her clothing torn and bloodstained, sweat

streaming down her face, as she thrust her spear into the side of the fierce samurai who slashed at her with his shining blade. And in the sweat and pain, there was such pride. The victory at grandfather's gate had not been easy or cheap, but it was their own. Even in death, this woman taught honor. Kesami thanked her mother's spirit, bowed, and departed, trotting home full of energy as she shed her doubt like a wet garment.

Still in the magic of the mountain, the sun had not moved and the house was asleep, all but the senior samurai who were already preparing for battle. Kesami slipped in unseen and took her bow and her straightest arrow. Then she wrote a poem.

*The flea hides in the fur of the
mouse-hunting fox.*

Perhaps the mouse will escape.

She tied the poem to the arrow and slipped out again, running up the road to the mountain. There she drew the bow and sent the arrow far up the mountain where it disappeared into the mist.

As she ran back to the house she noticed that the sun again sped across the sky. When she returned to the house, her wild and disheveled appearance stunned her friends and foes alike to silence. As she was helped into her armour, she fought to still her sudden regrets for the lack of the scroll.

The old general personally led her horse to her and held her foot as she mounted,

but he would not meet her eyes. Solemnly, they rode out, accompanied by the household personal guard, the unit flags fluttering from the backs of the standard bearers.

They dismounted on a flat plain above the river-bed. Kesami snapped her fingers for the map and gathered her officers around her. "They will not attack until they receive their supply column, and I have had no intelligence that they have arrived. We have until mid-day." Secretly she prayed that the tengu couldn't claim her worship for that tid-bit. After all, didn't merchants give free samples to entice the customer?

She stared at the map, trying hear her father's voice as he had discussed tactics, trying even harder to hear her mother's. The picture before her began to take on a pattern, like a piece of calligraphy. The brush strokes which marked the river and its branches almost danced on the paper, except where they were cut off by a dam. Suddenly it was all clear. She snapped out of her meditation, becoming suddenly aware of the nervous anticipation of her officers.

"Look, here, and here," she pointed. "Send samurai to organize the farmers to dig. Those earthworks hold back the river. We will flood out the entrenched enemy, to here," now it was her turn to tap out her points with the steel war fan. It had been her father's. The point was not lost on her generals and officers. "When the waters drive them out here, Uncle, take

your men to cut them off from behind." She wondered if she could trust him, but it was the risk a daimyo had to take. But, just in case... "And you," she chose one of her more loyal followers, "take your men to here, for a reserve. If they do not break to the rear, roll the flank and push them up into a bottleneck. Press them to the cliffs on the right. Stay on the high ground, and force them into the flood. Even if it does not flood deep, the mud will slow them up. General Torigami, you and I will have the honor of waiting for the enemy on the high ground as our noble forces drive them to us like fish in a net."

The forces were deployed and the dam released. The enemy slogged down the narrow valley, under heavy arrow fire from the left and boxed in on the right by the steep escarpment. The terrain which had protected them, now defeated them. The reinforcements were ambushed by a small force, and their lord prudently changed his mind about his alliance with Iga Tozaemon and ordered his forces to withdraw to his own lands.

It was nearly dark, and it was nearly over. The ghost fog again was settling from the mountain, dancing over the dead, caressing the living. Kesami stood crookedly, using a hacked tree trunk for support, her arms so heavy with exhaustion that she could hardly move them. Great Susano-o, she groaned, for out of the fog loomed a giant of a man. As he approached, she nearly cried out at his



Artwork by Alicia Austin

fierce appearance. His splendid armour and brocade clothing were splattered with blood that was not his own. His eyebrows met in a grim scowl, and his rippling muscles were more like those of a horse than a man. She looked around. She was alone. She laughed at the irony of it, to be defeated in the hour of her great victory. If this was her death, than so be it. She drew herself up and raised her sword.

He cut down, and she stepped aside, drawing her blade strongly to his stomach. He spun out of the cut and slashed back. She stepped back, but the tip clattered across her chest plates. Soon the blood began to ooze down Kesami's front. Again the giant cut down, Kesami deflecting the blow with her blade, but his strength was enormous, and the shock drove up her arms into her shoulders. She spun around, stabbing at him with quick jabs and finishing with a sweeping cut to his legs. He swept a blow up at her jaw, cutting the cord of her helmet and sending it flying off her head and clattering to the ground. She ducked a slice to her throat, but the slice slid across her brow, blinding her with her own blood. She staggered back, trying to wipe the blood from her eyes, blocking the next blow, to her wrist, by sheer blind skill. Again she cut to his stomach, this time shattering the lacquered slats of armour and releasing a gush of blood.

The giant staggered back into the fog. She tried to press her advantage, but she was too tired to move, and she let him go.

Between the enormity of her victory, the funeral of her father, and her wounds, it was ten days before she was free to wander in the garden again. There would be no late frost this year. She sat on her rock, looking at the moon-bathed mountain. It called her, irresistibly, and she left her garden and walked down the now-familiar road. Her newly healed wounds ached by the time she reached the stream at the first light of dawn. But she stood tall as she called, "Noble tengu, why have you called me here? What do you want?"

The little bird-like creature limped out from behind a rock. It had a huge stained bandage across its belly. In its hand it held a scroll. It fluttered up to a rock, and held the scroll out to her. "Take it. You earned it."

"I did not agree to your terms," she shouted, hotly. "I will not be tricked by you into losing a bet I never made."

"On my honor..." it began.

"I doubt that," she shouted back, boldly sure that the wounded goblin would not harm her.

"Please. I swear," it implored.

She clapped her hands together three times and called out, "Kami, gods of the Imperial Realm, Celestial Empress of Heaven Amateratsu, lords and ladies of her court, bear witness. This noble creature swears that it gives me this scroll without hindrance and of his own free will. Is this so?"

"It is," it said weakly. She took it and slipped off the silk cord. It unrolled in her hands. It was blank.

"What is this?" she bellowed at him. "You lied. You tried to bind me to you for a blank scroll."

"What happened out there?" it pleaded. She scowled at the creature. But it seemed so pitiful, and she had called on the gods to bear witness and protect her. And she had not shown much courtesy since she had arrived. "Very well. I flooded their position and forced them into a trap. Then we cut them off from their allies and drove them to their defeat."

"Look again at the scroll," it begged. She looked down, and there were suddenly pictures and instructions of the very battle she had fought, including her fight with the huge samurai. Now she knew who she had fought and defeated. "But, but, I do not understand..." she spluttered.

The tengu seemed cheered by her confusion. "You see," it chortled gleefully, "you still do not know my secret powers." With that it started to fly off.

"Wait," she shouted, using the voice of command which she had so newly discovered. The sound of her own voice now vibrated against the rocks. Suddenly a knowing filled her, making her joints feel weak like melting snow. "I did not need your scroll. I already had the knowledge and the skill. I only lacked confidence. If I had allowed you to empower me with the scroll, I would have believed that you were my true teacher. I would have won on my own skill, but given you the power through my worship of you instead of honoring myself. And I would have never been able to do anything again without you."

She stood silent a moment as the bird-like creature fluttered back and forth, sadly wringing its little hands. Poor lonely thing, she thought, and then she reverently bowed to the little creature. "You have taught me a great lesson, and you have been my teacher, and I honor you

for it. I will erect a shrine and pray to the kami and the buddhas to be merciful to you. I am grateful for what you have taught me, Uncle Tengu."

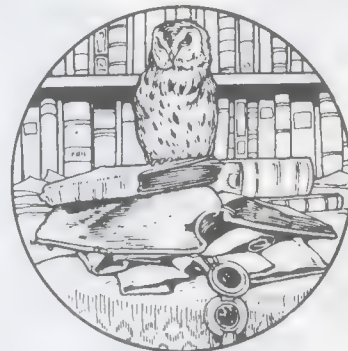
It returned the bow and vanished. The new morning sun blazed over the mountain as she thanked the gods for their witness. She breathed in the sweet spring air and strode down the mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, the villagers and the householders had gathered in droves. A great apparition had appeared at the first light of dawn. Great golden clouds had gathered high up on the mountain, and now they were coming down the mountain road toward the valley. As the billowing clouds approached, the people, highborn and low, watched with wonder as, emerging from the host of celestial deities, strode a small woman striding with the easy rolling gait of a samurai.

DANA KRAMER-ROLLS is fond of early music and Gregorian chants; is a knight and a viscountess in the Society for Creative Anachronism; and has been writing professionally for about ten years. Her most recent novel is *HOME IS THE HUNTER* from Pocket, a Star Trek novel. She has stories in volumes 2, 3, and 5 of *Sword and Sorceress*, has written interactive games ("Cut by Emerald" from Ace and "Warhorn" by Tor), and did a piece in a graphic anthology for Marvel Comics. Dana lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

ALICIA AUSTIN is in the process of doing a lavishly illustrated version of Andre Norton's *FUR MAGIC*. Her drawings have been delighting sf and fantasy fans for many years; she has also drawn for children's books.

Be wise...



SUBSCRIBE

**Powerful Fantasy
by the Author of
The Shadow Gate**

**Two Women.
Two Cultures:
One Magic.**

The hidden land of Gandhara, a matriarchy tucked away in the depths of the Hindu Kush, has survived in independence up to the nineteenth century thanks to the magic of its women. But now that magic is beginning to fail, challenged by the ambitious Russian Empire.

Tamai, a young Gandharan woman can't help protect her people because she can't master her magic. Whenever Tamai tries to fit her magic to the proper pattern it literally burns free. Louisa Westbrook, living in the English enclave in Peshawar, plays the docile role expected of an English gentlewoman, but has a terrible secret.

When the two women meet, their alliance will release the most powerful magic Gandhara has ever seen....

**BOUND GALLEYS
AVAILABLE**

MARGARET BALL FLAMEWEAVER



Distributed by Simon & Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

**Praise for
Margaret Ball's
The Shadow Gate:**

"This is a fun high fantasy novel, with lots of original touches and clever plotting."

—Scott Winnett, *Locus*

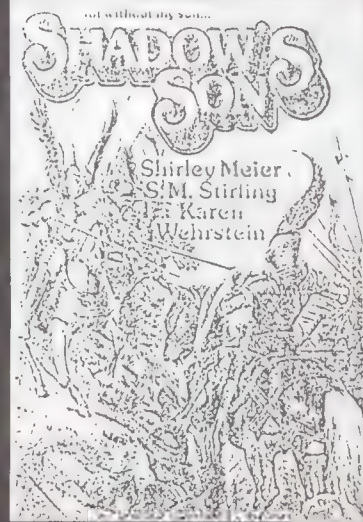
"This sprightly fantasy alternates between a world similar to 12th-century France but populated by elves and the New Age Psychic Research Center in Austin, Texas... The strange encounters between the two worlds are irresistible...."

—Publishers Weekly

"The plot is extremely well handled in all respects by a historical novelist making her debut in fantasy. Recommended."

—Booklist

72095-3 • 384 pages • \$4.99



Also Featuring:

Shadow's Son

by Shirley Meier

S.M. Stirling

& Karen Wehrstein

A New Novel of The Fifth Millennium.

72091-0 • 448 pages • \$4.99



Artwork by Hannah M.G. Shapero

The Wuzzles

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Lythande looked at her travelling companion and wondered if she would have to kill her. The law under which the Adept lived was rigid: she might never be known to any man as a woman. She knew that the law was perfectly literal and did not apply to a woman confidante, but the first confidante Lythande had chosen had been tortured to death in the attempt to force from her the secrets of Lythande; and Lythande did not wish to expose her new companion to such a possibility. Yet she could not simply kill the girl out of hand, so the question was one which occupied Lythande's mind at the moment without gravely troubling it as yet, for the country through which they passed was deserted, and for several days they had met no other travelers.

Now they appeared to be coming into a little village, and she must come to some conclusion about the girl. Frennet was not her lover — hardly, indeed, her friend, but she owed the girl something. Frennet had in fact saved her at the adventure of the inn at The Hag and Swine; and she did not want her to be killed, or tortured to force her secret from her. So sooner or later the problems of her traveling companion must be faced; and if they were again coming to inhabited parts, sooner rather than later.

Fortunately, Lythande thought, Frennet had no inkling of the life-and-death problem which occupied the mind of the magician-minstrel. The girl yawned, stretched, and said, "We seem to be coming to a town up there. I do hope

it's a good one, an' we can get somethin' to eat."

"You don't know? I imagined this was your part of the world and you would be more familiar with it than I," Lythande said.

The girl laughed and replied, "Not I; that old hag I worked for wouldn't let me outen the house even at high festivals, far less any other time. I never been here — or anyplace else, not since'n I was a baby."

"Which, I dare say, you hardly remember," Lythande said. "As for an inn, I hardly know; but there is no charge for hoping, at least. If all else fails, I suppose once again I may sing for my supper; little country towns are fine for that and welcome minstrels, if not always magicians."

"Will you teach me the magician's art, lady?"

"I will not," Lythande said. "It has been little more than a liability to me. Heaven forbid I should lay that curse on any other."

"Thass easy said," fretted the girl, "but you're long-lived, I see; an I'd like makin' me own choice in that, ma'am."

"You might find out — as I did — when it was too late, just what a heavy burden it is," Lythande said. "But the day may come when I apprentice you in a decent inn, as cook or house-maid, and leave you there. This town may be too small for that, but would you not like to be apprenticed to a sewing-woman or some such respectable trade?"

"But I don't want to leave you," the girl

stated, and Lythande sighed.

"Don't make me regret I took you from that inn; after all, there was no obligation on me to do so," she said with some harshness. "If you traveled long with me you would have much reason to know just how hard a life this pursuit of magic can be and how poor a trade it truly is. Just because you have picked up a little kitchen-magic does not make you a mage."

"No ma'am —"

"And you must not call me *ma'am* where you can be heard — remember that I travel in disguise, and if I am recognized as a woman I may be in grave trouble," Lythander reminded her sternly. Thus chastised, Frennet fell silent and they walked on.

They were now passing through the little village, and as if it were in answer to Lythande's unspoken wishes, they passed an open square where something like a hiring-fair was in progress. Many men and women of the peasant-kind were lined up there; servant maids with brooms or mops over their shoulders, farm hands with rakes or pitchforks, dairy-women each with a pail, and so forth. One of the more prosperous looking of the farmers saw Lythande with her companion and came toward them.

"Here, be you a magician for hire?"

"I am that," Lythande said, "but it is for my companion I seek work. And —"

"If ye're lawfully for hire —"

Lythande sighed; it was her own fault for showing herself at a hiring fair. "What can I do for you?"

"I got wuzzles in me barn, Magician." Lythande stared; this was a new one. "I beg your pardon," she said, "but I have never encountered...what sort of creature may a wuzzle be?"

"What? Don't ye have wuzzles where ye come from?"

"Indeed we do not, unless I know them by some other name."

"Oh well — they's grey an' fuzzy an' they gets in my barn an' they eats the grain —"

"My dear fellow," Lythande interrupted, "do you mistake me for an exterminator? Wouldn't it be simpler — and cheaper — to get yourself a cat?"

The farmer looked cross, but resigned, as if Lythande had made a mistake made many times before.

"I didn't say I had *mice*," he said resignedly, "I say I had *wuzzles*. Don't ye know the difference? The's grey an' fuzzy — an' ten feet across — an' they eats the grain an' ye canna hardly see 'em."

Lythande sighed.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I have never encountered a — whatever it is — a wuzzle — they are unknown in my country. I presume they are creatures of magic, then?"

"I don't know what they are," said the farmer. "But I got 'em, an' I wants them out'n me barn, see? An' I'll pay ye well to get rid of 'em."

Lythande sighed.

"The fates have spoken," she declared. "I had no intention of hiring myself here as a magician, but where there is need I must give me services. Tell me, since I know nothing of *wuzzles*: how does one get rid of the creatures?"

"Ye're the magician, not me," said the farmer truculently. "I thought sure ye'd know how to get rid o' the things. I ain't never had wuzzles before an' I dun'na know nothin' 'bout gettin' rid o' them."

Lythande reflected that she knew no more of getting rid of — what was it, wuzzles — than did the farmer; rather less, for at least he had known what they were. But he had spoken truly; Lythande was the magician, and she should know how to get rid of them.

"I have never before encountered such things," she stated, "nevertheless there may still be many surprises for me before the Last Day, and I can do no more than to attempt it."

If they were creatures which infested a farmer's barn, she supposed a banishing-spell might be what was wanted. Following the farmer to his barn, she spoke a simple all-purpose banishing-spell which, she supposed, would rid the place

of mice or of — what was it — wuzzles.

That had been simple enough; but the farmer scowled.

"Them wuzzles don't mind your spell, magician; I see they's still here. I thought sure a great magician like to you could get rid of 'em for me."

"As I said before," remarked Lythande, "I have never before encountered them. They are not known in my country; but I have engaged myself to rid your barn of wuzzles, and I will do so. But I must first consult my books of magic."

This was easy enough to say; but if wuzzles would not yield to a banishing-spell, she had really no idea how she would get rid of them. She had with her, in lieu of her books of magic, only a small all-purpose spell guide; she was sure wuzzles were not listed, but at last, under *infestation*, she did find a listing for wuzzles as a common infestation. She was quite, quite sure the listing had never been there before, but that was the way it tended to be with magical books; they tended not to have a thing listed until the magician needed it.

The remedy noted herbal banishing; and Lythande's knowledge of herbal spells was not as great as that of other remedies. She asked, "Is there in this village a seller of herbs?"

She would consult with him as to the remedy for wuzzles, if indeed such herbs were known hereabouts.

"There is an herb-seller," said the farmer warily. "I quarreled with him last winter; d'ye think it's him set this thing on me?"

"I do not know; I trust not," said Lythande. "You know your neighbors better than I; I am a newcomer to these parts." She thought to herself that the farmer looked not like one who would be on particularly good terms with his neighbors; he looked a little too prosperous for that. And his truculent manner of speech was not such as to make him well liked. In fact, so Lythande thought, she did not like him at all, and did not blame his neighbors. Still, she had promised, she must get rid of — oh yes, wuzzles! — for the farmer, and it did not matter too much whether his personality pleased her, or not; she did not have to live with him.

She adjourned them to the inn she had seen in the village and sent Frennet to speak to the herb-seller for her. After a time the girl came back with eyes aglow.

"Well?"

"Oh, yes. There is an herb-seller here," the girl enthused, "such a nice young man, too; tall an' handsome — an' he

knows all about wuzzles. They used to be all over the place in his grandfer's time. An', an' he says that old farmer isn't liked by anyone, an' it serves him right if he's got wuzzles, or worse things — if so be there is worse things. He's an old skin-flint, he is; he's known to keep back his grain 'til there's famine, an', an' he sells it at cut-throat prices when folk go hungry, an' sells it cheap so as to put folk out o' business when there's plenty. The herb-seller became a herb-seller because he couldn't make a livin' at the farming wi' that old fellow around."

Then he may have set the wuzzles on him, Lythande thought, but she did not say so; short of recommending that the farmer find a way to live at peace with his neighbors, she had no part in local disputes. "Bid the herb-seller to come and see me," she said.

It was late in the day and the first sun, Reth, was just beginning to touch the horizon, though the second sun was still high in the sky, when the herb-seller came to the inn. He came into Lythande's presence with his bundles, grinning and bowing, asking, "How may I serve my lord magician?"

At least Frennet had not revealed her secret.

"You know, then, how to rid the barn of wuzzles?"

"Oh, aya, sir; ye burn candles made o' herbs, an' they goes elsewhere. They canna' stand the smell o' me magical herbs."

She felt like asking him if he set the wuzzles on his neighbor. But she supposed it did not matter. The last thing she wished for was to become entangled in the internal affairs of the village. Frennet was regarding the man with as much delight as if she had invented him. Lythande bought several packets of his magical herbs and paid him well for them (though they made her sneeze, and she realized with dismay that she was allergic to either the magical herbs, or the wuzzles, or perhaps both). *Was a sneezing magician any better than a stuttering one?* she thought, and began grimly preparing to make the herbs into candles. This was a long affair; long before she finished, Frennet had gone to sleep peacefully on the floor, and Lythande, her nose dripping, resolved never again to entangle herself with an herb-seller, even if it meant she must learn a whole new method of magic.

Frennet woke cheerfully and admired the candles.

"How pretty they are! I'll go an' tell the

herb-seller what good use ye made of his herbs, shall I?"

"Do what you please; but let's get on with it, and get out of this accursed — *ka-choo* — town," Lythande said.

"You caught a cold, ma'am — sir?" Frenner amended hastily at Lythande's glare. "Shall I get you a remedy from the herb-seller?"

"No need," growled Lythande. "Let's just finish this up and get out of this town." Frenner's face fell; she obviously wanted to see the herb-seller again.

At dawn they sent a message to the farmer, asking him to join them in the infested barn.

"I can clear your barn of the infestation of wuzzles," she remarked. "But I cannot insure that it will stay free — *ka-choo* — and I admonish you that you should learn to live at peace with your neighbors."

Another explosive sneeze perforated her remarks and the farmer regarded Lythande without enthusiasm.

"I'll let 'em alone if they lets me alone," he said.

"That may not — *ka-choo* — be good enough," Lythande warned. "I admonish you, forgive and forget, or something worse than wuzzles may come upon

you." The effect of these exhortations was a little diminished by another enormous sneeze. The farmer looked frankly skeptical now. However, as instructed by Lythande, he began to set out the candles in a ring around the inside of the barn, while Lythande busied herself inscribing a pentagram on the wooden floor.

At last the herbal candles were set out in every point and valley of the pentagram, and Lythande, sneezing again, lighted the candles. The burning herbs, penetrating her offended nose, set off still another paroxysm of sneezes, but she instructed the farmer to chase the wuzzles into the pentagram and proceeded to recite a banishing-spell.

Pop! a wuzzle, as she recited the spell, winked out of existence, then another. With a series of little pops, each followed by a sneeze, one by one the wuzzles faded into another dimension, or into somewhere, not here.

Soon they were all gone; and Lythande made haste to extinguish the candles.

"They are gone," she said, "now, I admonish you, find a way to live at peace with your neighbors, and every month burn one of these candles." She taught

him a banishing spell, and when the old man was done growling about the fee (I could ha' done that," he grumbled), she returned to the inn for Frenner, finding her in the herb-seller's company.

"Are you ready to go?"

Frenner looked sad. All of a sudden Lythande knew what ailed her.

"You wish to stay with this herb-seller."

"Well, an' I do. He says he'll teach me his herb-magic," Frenner replied, and Lythande, sneezing again, realized that this was a perfect solution.

"So be it," she said, and Frenner babbled with delight.

"If so be ye'd leave yer apprentice w' me," the herb-seller said, "I can teach her all me herb-lore."

"So —" a vast sneeze punctuated Lythande's words, "So be it."

"Ye better let me make you up a remedy for that —" Frenner sneezed, "that cold."

"I don't think that's necessary," Lythande said. "Only let me get out of this town" (and its herbs, and its wuzzles) "and all shall be well."

It was not nearly as easy as that; but by noon, Lythande turned her back on the little town, bidding goodbye to an ec-



Artwork by Hannah M.G. Shapero



Artwork by Hannah M.G. Shapero

static Frennet, burbling about having her own house and her own kitchen, once she was wedded to the herb-seller.

Lythande bade her an affectionate farewell, genuinely pleased that she had found a solution for the girl; who sneezed as she said farewell and Lythande remembered she had sneezed as she said "So be it," thus wishing sneezes upon her former traveling companion. Magic could be far too unpleasantly literal sometimes.

Well, at least she had gotten rid of the wuzzles, and her own sneezing would stop soon; and the herb-seller could make his wife up a remedy for her sneezing, for all the good it would do. He was not much of a magician.

But for now she would put this town, and the wuzzles, as far behind her as possible.

She went down the road, sneezing. 

HANNAH M.G. SHAPERO is trained as an architectural illustrator. She has been a professional fantasy/sf illustrator since 1981. She has done four Darkover covers (SHARRA'S EXILE, SWORD OF CHAOS, HAWKMISTRESS, and THENDARA HOUSE) and has illustrated many other books, games, and magazines. She still does architectural art as well as portraits and other private commissions. HMGS lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

Dragon's Lair

by Stephanie Shaver and Ronald Pisano

"Is all well?" cried Rockar the Red, brandishing his mighty two-handed blade and slashing effortlessly through the chains which held the princess.

The woman sighed, fluttered her eyes. In the middle of the great lair, the dragon lay dead, split in twain by the sword of Rockar. Gold and jewels littered the cave, all stained a fierce red.

"I was sent here by your noble parent,

Triblae the Esteemed, fair princess, to save you from the clutches of this cruel beast. I ask again, is all well?"

The woman thought a moment, one delicate white finger on her ruby lips. "That depends," she said at last, "on whether you are asking the dragon or the maiden." She pointed toward the dragon carcass.

Rockar spun, fearing that the wrym

might have come back to life by some evil magic trick dragons were so fond of, but — lo! Instead of a dragon that lay split in twain by the mighty double-edge, there lay a maiden-corpse, her blood-splattered fair face frozen in shock.

The hero turned back just in time to see the dragon turn back into its true form, smile, and breathe a blast of fire point blank in his face. 

Marion Zimmer Bradley

Talks To Writers: The Perfect Cover Letter

It reads something like this:

Dear editor: (or Dear Ms. Bradley, or even Dear Marion—if you are on that kind of terms with me)

Enclosed is my 3500 word story entitled "Dozens of Dragons". I have had nothing published in any professional publication. I am offering first publication rights. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed for return if you cannot use it at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Neopro

Of course, you don't even have to say that much; you should have most of that information on the title page of your story. The rest is really superfluous. I know it's a story; it wouldn't be the back of a plate, or a brick from the Great Wall of China. And if you've read my guidelines, as outlined in the last of these columns, you know that if it's an article it should have been discussed with me in advance; we never buy non-fiction except on commission, so drop me a letter in advance outlining your non-fiction project and I can tell you whether we're in the market for such a submission, or whether we already have enough of them for the next two years. You should also have it on your title or first page that the story is 3500 words long—much more than that it might be a cover story and hopefully you'd have discussed it in advance with me—and if you've done your job right, I'll know within the first couple of paragraphs that it's—say—about a girl named Cynthia who wants to earn a living herding dragons, in spite of her brothers' skepticism. (Don't use that plot; it would be rejected as "too feminist." And I've lost track of the number of times I've seen it already.)

Now here is an example of a bad cover letter (Alas, I still get all too many of these.):

Dear Marion, (I've never heard of this person, but obviously she feels we are intimates.)

I'm sending you a science fiction story of 9,000 words, which I'm hoping you can use for your new magazine or for one of your anthologies. I've been a reader of everything you've written for the last forty years and I really think this story is just right for you. Nobody has read it yet except my kids and they just loved it. I have two daughters and they admire your work. I thank you in advance for reading this. Any

comments you wish to make will be gratefully received and if you cannot use it maybe you can suggest another market.

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy Dumbwriter

Now just why does this letter, or the dozens of imitations of it I get every month, fill me with so much helpless rage? Dorothy Dumbwriter and her various clones are just nice friendly girls, and anyhow a writer's magazine said once that you should strive to stand out somehow from the thousands of other cover letters, didn't it? Yes, to my misery—and for my sins—I am deluged every day with these amateur efforts at standing out from the common herd. Why not try to stand out by your professionalism? That would give both of us a pleasant surprise.

As I said, if you'd read the guidelines you'd know I never buy anything that length; even if it were a potential Hugo or Nebula winner I wouldn't want it at that length, which may be my loss. Anyway I am not likely to change my mind in the foreseeable future. And in the second place, the requirements are subtly but definitely different for the magazine and for the anthologies (especially the Darkover anthologies, and I do not buy Darkover stories for MZB's FM). You should, if you are serious about this profession you want to get into, know the market to which you are submitting. Even a plumber has to know how to use a monkey wrench.

I've recently added a line to my computerized rejection letters for the benefit of people who start off their cover letters saying "I've never seen a copy of your magazine or the guidelines but I'm submitting a story." It should clue them in that I'm not really very receptive to a story which could equally well be submitted to *Weird Tales* or to *Analog*. It suggests politely that they read a couple of issues before submitting again to get a feel for the kind of stuff I like—or at least for what we print.

When you have a lot of published stories in our magazine, you can come in and sit on my desk—or in my lap. But while you're still an unpublished writer in the slush pile, I don't really care that your four kids or your mother think your writing (or even mine) is the best thing since Mark Twain. Nor am I particularly interested if you've been published in *Money and Markets* or even in the *New Yorker*—and I couldn't care less if your whole writers' group thinks you could be the next Hugo winner or a candidate for a Pulitzer prize. One hundred times zero is still zero. I'm interested in knowing if you have any professional or near-professional credits IN FANTASY—that is, for something I can use.

I'd also like to mention negatively the "anticipated rejection" letter which says "I didn't really know what to do with this piece of junk—"

Well, if you really think it's junk, I suggest you throw it in a

wastebasket and write something better. When you have a story you can be proud of, time enough to send it to me.

One more pet peeve in cover letters: the new or unpublished writer who says he — or she — wants to use a pen name on her fantasy “in case I write something serious some day.” In the first place, if your work isn’t good enough for you to put your name on, why should you think it’s good enough for me to print? I put my own name on my work even when the common belief was that women couldn’t get printed in science fiction or fantasy — despite Mary Shelley, Dorothy Macardle, and Leigh Brackett. Things have changed; even if your name is not ambiguous, Susan or Rosemary or Melissa, why call yourself S.J. or M.H. or R.B.? Be brave. In my estimation, there are a few good reasons for using a pen name: if your name is ridiculous or impossible to spell — or your father was a joker who presented you with a name like Ima Hogg, or Rose Busch — feel free to pick something else. Or if you are (forced by poverty or the need to put shoes on your kids) required to write something you’re ashamed of, you can’t be blamed for calling yourself something else.

Or if you are well known in another field — if you have a medical degree or a law degree and you don’t think the others in your field would appreciate it. Or, if there is a well known writer or other famous person with the same name as yourself — if your name is Anne Landers or George Bush, you’ll obviously want something less notorious.

And if you don’t fall into any of these categories, the law allows you to use any name you like if you aren’t defrauding anybody. So if your name is Abdul Hafiz and you want to call yourself Jane Smith, just write to me under that name; open a post box or a bank account in your chosen pen name; it’s silly, but legal — it’s a free country.

Winners of last issue's

Cauldron voting

◆ First Place: “According to Custom”

—G.E. Gaines

◆ Second Place: “Ghstdance”

— J.A. Deveau

◆ Third Place: “The Dark God's Gift”

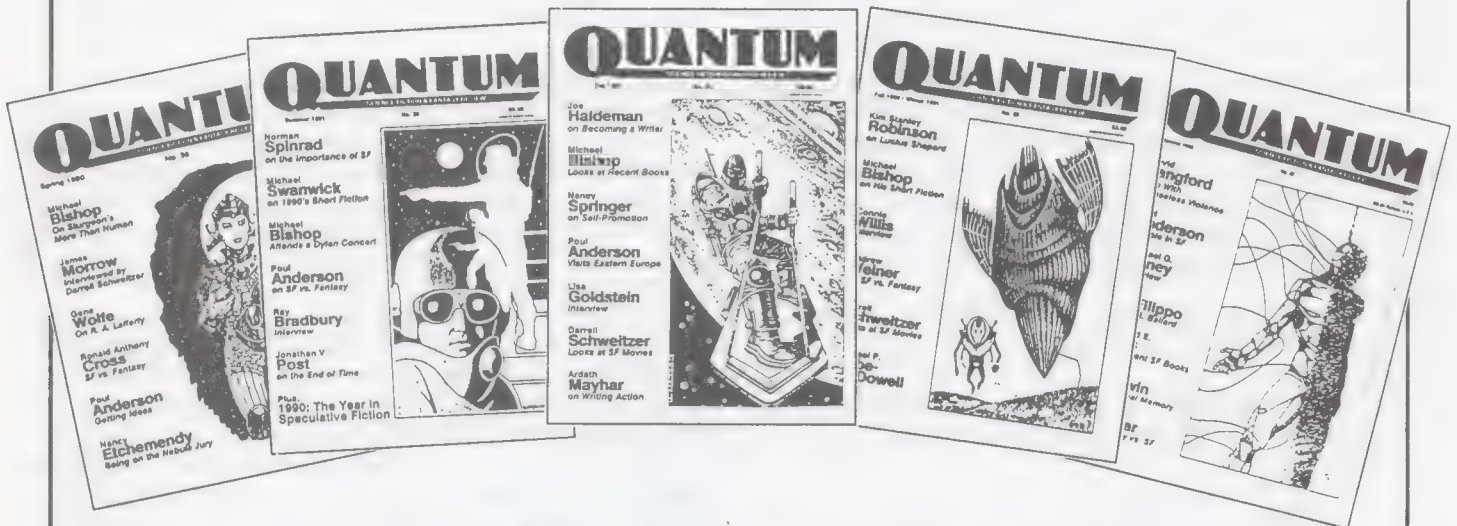
— Patricia Duffy Novak

Our congratulations to the winners, and our thanks to all of you who took the time to vote!

Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at

**FANTASY
Magazine**

Five-Time Hugo Award Nominee!



Sample Copy: \$3.00 (\$3.50 foreign).
Subscriptions: 3-issues (\$7.00 U.S., US\$10.00 foreign)

Thrust Publications
8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877 USA



Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

Heartleaf

by Susan Hanniford Crowley

As I held the tiny gold leaf-shaped pendant in my hand, it sang with a delicate bell-like voice, sometimes like a chime, sometimes like a flute. I turned to the old woman who was standing by the exhibit. It was she who had encouraged me to pick it up. Since she wore an official museum badge, I figured it was all right.

"What's the story?" I asked. "Why is it singing in my hand?"

"It doesn't sing for everyone. The first person it ever sang for was Eudora. She was beautiful, raven-haired and lithe, a lady in King Arthur's court. She was greatly admired by Lancelot, and though he told her he was devoted to God, she grew to love him. One night she saw him go out into the garden, over the bridge to the grove of willow and aspen down by the brook. She followed.

"From the crest of the bridge, she saw

Queen Guinevere emerge from the grove and take Lancelot's hands. Together they disappeared into the willows. Crushed, Eudora's heart broke. Her dreams of love crumbled, and the honor of her kingdom would follow.

"Her single tear fell on an aspen leaf floating almost beneath the bridge. The tiny leaf turned to gold and sank through the rippling water of the brook. With the voice of a pure heart, it sang for the pain in Eudora's heart, as it came to rest on the brook's sandy floor. Through the centuries it remained there, a marker of the night of betrayal, of the night love died.

"Last year in one of the many sites excavated in hopes of finding Camelot, it was discovered. The legends say it only sings in the hand of one who loves and is about to be betrayed."

I turned quickly to ask the woman

what she meant. But she had disappeared. The tiny gold leaf continued to sing in the palm of my trembling hand.

SUSAN HANNIFORD CROWLEY is a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. She has stories in *SPELLS OF WONDER* and *SWORD & SORCERESS* 9.

Susan is contributing editor for an international literary magazine, *Resonance*. Resonance Communications, Inc. (P.O. Box 215, Beacon, NY 12508) has published a book of her New Age poetry, *LAKE WITH NO HORIZON*. Available through mail-order, proceeds go to help with the medical expenses incurred during her husband Larry's heart transplant.

VINCENT DI FATE won the Hugo for Best Professional artist in 1979.

Interview with Teresa Edgerton

by Sandra Brandenburg and Debora Hill

"I'm sure we've met before," Teresa Edgerton, my partner Debora, and I must have all said at some time during the afternoon. Edgerton is the author of *THE GREEN LION TRILOGY*, published by Ace Books, and *GOBLIN MOON*, also from Ace, which came out in February 1991. The sequel to *GOBLIN MOON*, *THE GNOME'S ENGINE*, was released in July.

She had set out a very pretty tea service and we were so pleased. As an interviewer it is reassuring to see signs of welcome on the part of the interviewee.

We set out to do the interview in a house that was full almost to overflowing with her four children, husband, and six cats. She made every effort to accommodate us in the menagerie, and soon we were chattering like bluejays with a scandal to disclose. It wasn't until she mentioned working at the Northern California Renaissance Faire that we made the connection.

"For seventeen or eighteen years I read the Tarot, and tea-leaves, and did crystal gazing. I was a professional fortune-teller, but it was more of a part-time job. Not the 'bait and switch' of a con-artist, but a kind of counseling which was practical and down-to-earth."

That was when it all clicked into place for us. Five years running we had gone to her at the Faire to have our fortunes told via the Tarot cards. There had been a cute little cottage, and she looked every bit the part of a young fortune-teller and wife, the proud mother of a burgeoning family. Atmosphere and clothes are everything to a woman's appearance. This time, when she met us at the door of her house she was wearing slacks, and the cute little cottage was tucked out in the backyard as a doghouse. Not many dogs have a two-room house with an attached herb garden. We'd been missing her at the Faire for the last few years; she was just about the best fortune-teller we'd ever had. Her time working at the Faire was well spent, however.

"It wasn't too difficult for me to research THE GREEN LION TRILOGY, because I know a lot about how people lived during medieval times from working at the Renaissance Faire and my years in the Society for Creative Anachronism. I've read a lot of fantasy myself, and I was always thinking, 'No, no—you can't do that with a broadsword!' or 'People didn't eat those things for dinner then!' I'd been researching the trilogy for ten years without realizing what the knowledge would

be used for. It was nice that I already knew what I was doing, because when I came across a question I couldn't answer I could go to my friends who had more specialized knowledge about the period, and I knew which books to look through. I wanted the background to be right, because I think fantasy needs a realistic background. The reader needs something to hold onto, so the fantastic elements don't strain his or her credulity. You can't ask the reader to believe more than 'three impossible things before breakfast'."

The research for the first trilogy may been a long, naturally occurring process, but the same could not be said of the first volume of the second trilogy. In spite of the fact that she had previously read a lot of novels based in the eighteenth century, hard facts were not so easy to come by. *"When I started to write GOBLIN MOON I didn't realize it would be much more difficult to do the research. It's true I didn't know as much about the period, but there's also much less information available about the 18th century than there is about the Middle Ages. Names and dates, yes...but not what people ate and how they dressed. I guess the Middle Ages has more of a hold on the popular imagination. I'd read a lot of historical novels and I had a feel for the period, but I wanted to get the details right, even though I was using an imaginary world. It's supposed to be one dimension over, but very close in most things—another earth in a universe so close that ideas and things can pass back and forth between the dimensional barrier. That's why we believe in trolls and goblins and things we don't have—they have them in that world, and the idea of them passes through into our world. Their religion is different, but there are a lot of similarities in the form of the rituals. But the things I did learn about the period were weird and wonderful—Mesmer's magnetic tub, and carriages drawn by sheep, and all sorts of strange, magical beliefs."*

Edgerton's hero, Lord Skelbrooke, is modeled in many ways after the heroes by Rafael Sabatini, Baroness Orczy, Georgette Heyer, and others. As a consequence he is the very image of an elegant, 18th century male. If you need a path to follow, use only the best. Skelbrooke is his own man and anything but a copy, but he does incorporate some of the best of these heroes. *"Skelbrooke isn't based on a real person, but a lot of the aliases he uses are taken from other characters—sort of my tribute to the 'swashbuckling' novel. The name he uses most is Robin Carstares—Jack Carstares*

was the hero in *THE BLACK MOTH*, who was a highwayman. And Robin Tremaine was the hero in *THE MASQUERADERS*. 'Mortal Sin' and 'Dr. Crow' were both inspired by *THE SCARECROW OF ROMNEY MARSH*."

Like many of Heyer's heroes, Lord Skelbrooke is not a square-jawed, towering piece of muddle-headed honor. The character takes some surprising twists and turns. "Lord Skelbrooke developed in strange and unusual ways. I had intended for him to be a traditional romantic hero, and the turning point in his development came when the High Priest of the Satanic cult was about to mutilate and murder the girl, and Skelbrooke tells him, 'Stop or I'll shoot.' The High Priest stops, but Skelbrooke shoots him anyway. In all the stories I've read the hero always has the villain at his mercy, but he never shoots. You know, if that guy is allowed to get away then he'll just do it again. When Robin Hood has his sword at the Sheriff of Nottingham's throat and he lets him go, that sheriff is going off to oppress and murder and steal all over again."

"I am a very nonviolent person, but I decided it was time a hero took care of the villain once and for all. What are these guys? Superman, Batman, Zorro...those guys are vigilantes. They've taken on the responsibility of ridding the world of evil without any authority—if you're arrogant enough to do that, you might as well be efficient in the job. I don't actually want to see the bad guy get hurt, I just want him gone so he won't be a threat anymore. A good, clean death—better than he deserves. The moment Skelbrooke pulled the trigger, his character became more complex and interesting."

In the sequel to *GOBLIN MOON*, Edgerton deals with some of the personal problems of her hero. For whatever else Lord Skelbrooke might be, he bears little resemblance to the squeaky clean Batman or Superman. Besides the pernicious habit of vigilantism, Skelbrooke needs to work on some of his other habits before he is a fit partner for the enterprising heroine of these books, Sera. "There were some changes I felt Skelbrooke had to go through if he was going to marry Sera—she wasn't the kind of girl who would settle down with him if he continued to be too roguish. Also, I didn't want him to continue to be a drug addict; he needed time to cure that problem. His addiction was one of the things that surprised me when it happened; a lot of things about him came upon me as a surprise. It's difficult to have a hero who's a homicidal drug addict with a split personality."

To say the least. Read *THE GNOME'S ENGINE* for further explanation. And of one thing you can rest assured: it is not another predictable little fantasy that leaves you with the vague feeling that maybe you've read it before.

"I don't know where fantasy is going. Every time I think that a certain sub-genre like 'the Medieval Quest Fantasy' is over and has been worked to death, a whole new group of writers comes along and they do very well. For the first ten years of the fantasy revival I read every Arthurian novel that came along. Finally, I'd had enough—there's not a heck of a lot of suspense about how that particular story is going to come out."

So she took a gamble, and with the example before her of several successes in the alternate-history and cross-genre fields, it seemed a reasonable thing to do. The results are worth reading. "I thought *GOBLIN MOON* was a cross-genre novel and that it would have a pretty wide appeal because of that. My publisher hasn't really picked up on that. Instead of trying to sell it to everyone, they like to know exactly where their market is. So, I don't know where things are going, but I personally like the multi-genre idea. When I thought about what I would do after *THE GREEN LION TRILOGY*, I knew I didn't want anything that was either medieval or quest fantasy. Most fantasies fall into the categories of 'court intrigue', 'the wizard comes of age', 'the quest', or 'the characters are caught up in the great war'. I wanted to write something that was none of those things. And I wanted to use a European-type setting but I wanted a New World-type setting, also. So in the second volume they go to the New World. Because I left some of the characters behind in Europe, the

book goes back and forth between the two continents, and there's a lot of contrast between the societies; the industriousness and down-to-earth quality of the New World as compared to the old."

Much had happened to me during the years since I saw her at the Faire; what about Teresa? Was she still the same woman? Had those years been easy ones, during which she wrote her books and read Tarot cards while pretty children cavorted about her?

"It sounds like I was an overnight success, but if you consider that I spent seven years working on the first two books before anyone ever read them, I think that would be a fallacy. During that time we lived in genteel poverty in the Oakland ghetto. It's very enlightening living like a poor black when you were born and raised white and middle-class—enlightening, but not very amusing. When I thought later about the characters in *CHILD OF SATURN*, I realized that a lot of the things that happened to Prescelli (the

sub-villainess) were things I was going through. I was always wearing hand-me-downs. They were in good shape, and I was very grateful to get them, and I didn't feel put-upon the way Prescelli did; but everything was too large. I remember walking around with holes in my shoes, because I would rather spend my meager resources on more books than on new shoes.

"During most of that time we had three kids; some of it we had the four. We were crowded into a two-bedroom house, and I was doing my writing, and at first none of the kids were in school. The dining room was my office and my oldest daughter's bedroom, and it was right next to the kitchen. After I sold the book, all my relatives started to look for it in the stores about two months later. Seven years to write the books, three years before the first one came out, and eleven years after I started, I'm still not rich and famous. So I don't think I can say I was an overnight success.

"My husband always worked steadily, but it's hard to maintain a family of six on a single income these days. We always marveled that



Photo by John Ramos

other people could live so well and support their vices while we had no vices to speak of—except books and chocolate—and we were barely making it. We always thought ‘next year’ would be better, but it never was until I sold the first book. A lot of what was difficult for me was the fact that the kids couldn’t have everything I would have liked to give them. But they did have a mom at home with them, which a lot of their friends didn’t have. I thought it was important for me to be there—more important than the money. I don’t think they always agreed that it was a good thing to have mom there, at least not at the time. Still, I think back on all the things I would have liked to do for them when they were little, and I realize I can’t because the time has gone. I get sloppy sentimental about that sometimes. Motherhood is guilt—you’re damned if you do, and damned if you don’t. I’m sure I’d feel equally guilty if I hadn’t been home whenever they wanted me; if I hadn’t been around to help Gwyneth with her school work, even though in the end I never did much good. The schools were abysmal and my oldest daughter couldn’t get help for her learning disabilities, because you can’t be white and disadvantaged—or so we were told.

“Sometimes the kids like having an author for a mother, and sometimes they don’t. Miles gets really irritated because his friends at school don’t believe I really wrote the books. I try to explain to him that they’re jealous of him, because they think it’s something special to have a mother who writes books. He doesn’t quite understand, because to him I’m just a regular mom. And, of course, I am—only grumpier, when I need peace and quiet to write in and I’m not getting it.”

Teresa may be a regular mom, but her heroes are a little skewed. Not only is Skelbrooke a drug addict who kills people in the course of his vigilantism, but Ceilyn (in *THE GREEN LION TRILOGY*) is a reluctant werewolf who believes his shape-changing is a curse that proves he is unclean—initially he feels that if he is pious enough, and remains a virgin, perhaps the curse will go away. As a young man he is unable to maintain his own standards, however, and is eventually forced to face his problems and deal with them.

Her heroines are somewhat unusual, also. Her apprentice sorcerer Teleri is a shy and retiring girl of nondescript looks. She also has a virginity complex, and feels that if she remains pure her art and power will somehow be stronger. Of course, she, like Ceilyn, is deluding herself—it is through love that they are both strengthened and find their power. But all through *THE GREEN LION TRILOGY* and even in *GOBLIN MOON*, though their religion is not Christianity (being an alternate but very close universe, everything in *GOBLIN MOON* is slightly different, slightly off-kilter with our world) it is obvious that religion is an important facet of Edgerton’s writing, just as good research and a realistic plot structure are. And even though her careful work paid off business-wise, there had to come a time when Edgerton felt she was out of her depth and needed assistance.

“I didn’t get an agent until after I’d sold *THE GREEN LION TRILOGY* and was about to sell *GOBLIN MOON*. I figured, by that time, I needed an agent to get me more money and bargaining power. Since *CHILD OF SATURN* was out and looked like it was going to be successful, I knew I shouldn’t try to do any more on my own. I knew I had to get more money if I was going to afford to go on writing. If I didn’t, I’d have to get a regular job to help support the family.

“I got the phone number of an agent from another writer—it wasn’t her agent, but as it happened her agent was in England and wouldn’t be back for a month—I didn’t have a month to wait. I sent a copy of *CHILD OF SATURN* as an example of my writing; she telephoned me and became my agent. There are few agents who would turn down a deal that’s practically settled, so that’s how I got someone more experienced than I might have found when I was first starting out.”

So Edgerton avoided writer’s hell (having to get another job to support the family) and from that point on, it’s been clear

sailing, right? Well, not exactly...

“*CHILD OF SATURN* and *THE MOON IN HIDING* are the only books I’ve seen any royalties on as yet; the others all came out too recently. The publisher can hold onto your money until the time is up for the bookstores to return their copies—that’s eighteen months to two years. However, I’m told that most of the bookstores return them in about three weeks, if they’re not moving. They tear the covers off and send those back—the rest are junked. The way things are set up, it’s cheaper, with paperbacks, to junk them than to send them back. The cost of shipping makes it viable to just order more copies later—the bookstores don’t have to pay for copies they don’t sell, and they don’t have to send them back, either. So they can just toss ‘em. I think the wood pulp goes back into something...I certainly hope so. But it’s a very inefficient system, and we writers like to think we suffer the most from its inequities.

“Although I didn’t have any problems with my publisher over *GOBLIN MOON* when I was writing it, I think they were anticipating some in the marketing of the book, because it’s not your usual medieval fantasy. They really liked it, but I could feel they were apprehensive about how it would be received and how well it would do. Because the market is so bad, not many copies of the book were printed. But it seems to be selling well.

“The thing is, they weren’t sure who would buy this book—what the audience would be, the kind of people who would read it. I haven’t heard from anyone who didn’t like the book. Almost everything that’s in a traditional fantasy is in this book, but I’ve moved the setting forward about two hundred years, into the same time frame as all the classic adventure books we read when we are kids. I think it was the logical next step.”

Edgerton has left the Oakland ghetto for a house farther south in the East Bay, and her children are growing up. She has established herself as a novelist at the forefront of the fantasy revival. She is now also an editor for *Midnight Zoo*, a new fantasy, horror, and science fiction magazine, and devotes much of her time to selecting and reviewing material for the magazine. She plans to do more editing in the future. “I like working the small press because even though we publish on a shoestring and go from crisis to crisis, everyone is so helpful and supportive—all the other magazines and editors—which was something of a revelation when I first got involved. I thought those people would behave like they were our competitors, but they’re our friends and colleagues instead. And we can publish the stories we love without thinking always about the bottom line, and concentrate more on old-fashioned story values instead of cutting-edged fiction...or reverse that and go completely experimental occasionally. We don’t have to answer to anyone but our readers.

“Actually, I like having a foot in both worlds—small press as an editor, commercial publishing as a novelist. All my life, I’ve lived in more than one world anyway, so this is very familiar to me.”

And of course, her favorite characters are still with her, making plans...

“The sequel to *GOBLIN MOON*, *THE GNOME’S ENGINE*, was released in July. I sent in a proposal for a ‘prequel’ to *GOBLIN MOON*. I wanted to explain how Lord Skelbrooke got into the ‘masked avenger’ business in the first place, but my publisher put the project on hold. They asked for more books in the ‘Green Lion’ setting: three ‘stand alone’ books. They aren’t about Ceilyn and Teleri, because I feel their story is pretty much told; but I left a lot of questions unanswered about the secondary characters—so now I get to take care of them. And I get to go back to working with alchemy and fabulous beasts and earth magic...I’m really very excited.”

21

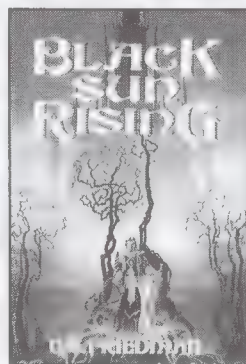
DEBORAH HILL AND SANDRA BRANDENBURG are both natives of Northern California. They began writing together in 1988 and are currently working on a four-volume fantasy series. They began interviewing authors in the Fall of 1990 and have discovered that they are better subjects than rock-and-roll singers.

New from DAW Books!

BLACK SIIN RISING by G. S. Friedman

On the planet Erna, humans have achieved an uneasy stalemate with the *fae*, a terrifying natural force with the power to give life to people's nightmare images or treasured dreams, little realizing that the demonic *fae* are rapidly gaining in strength. And as these dark *fae* multiply, four people are drawn together for a mission that will force them to confront an evil beyond imagining.

0-88677-485-3 Fantasy/Original Hardcover \$18.95 (\$24.99 in Canada) Nov. '91



LERONI OF DARKOVER edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley

All-new stories that reveal legendry and lore about the most fascinating dwellers on Darkover, those gifted with *laran*, magical powers of the mind which enable the *leroni* to raise and control natural forces, to communicate over vast distances, and to exercise countless other special abilities.

0-88677-494-2 Fantasy/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Nov. '91



HORSE FANTASTIC edited by Martin H. Greenberg & Rosalind M. Greenberg

Let these steeds carry you off to adventure and enchantment as they race, swift as the wind, to the magic lands. You'll meet a devilish horse who just might make your wishes come true... a ghostly creature whom even death couldn't keep from the winner's circle... and a herd of other wonderful horses who will take you for a whirlwind gallop into new worlds of fantasy.

0-88677-504-3 Fantasy/Original Anthology \$4.50 (\$5.99 in Canada) Dec. '91



WILD MAGIC (Wild Magic #1) by Jo Clayton

Return to the universe of the *Drinker of Souls* and explore a whole new domain in this enchanted world where rival gods vie for mastery by manipulating both the forces of nature and their own devoted worshipers. As young Faan, goddess-chosen, takes her first steps down the pathway to power, other gods' followers are preparing a devastating strike at the very heart of her world.

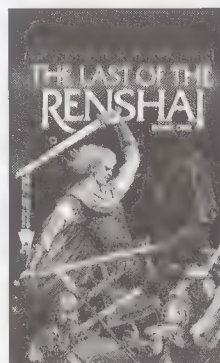
0-88677-496-9 Fantasy/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Dec. '91



THE LAST OF THE RENSHAI (Renshai #1) by Mickey Zucker Reichert

The Renshai—the mightiest, most hated and feared of all warrior races. When their enemies band together in a surprise attack, one Renshai warrior escapes, determined to keep the memory of his people alive and to claim his vengeance on the slayers of his race. But he is destined to walk the pathways of prophecy, and may be doomed to become the Champion of the Great War...

0-88677-503-5 Fantasy/Original \$5.99 (\$6.99 in Canada) Jan. '92



TWO-BIT HEROES (Gate of Ivory #2) by Doris Egan

Drawn back to Ivory by her fascination with a world where magic not science holds sway, Theodora embarks with Sorcerer Ran on a mission into a province plagued by outlaws, where Ran is mistaken for the leader of a dangerous band long sought by the local law officers. Pursued by government forces, Ran and Theodora run for their lives—straight into the clutches of the outlaws!

0-88677-500-0 SF/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Jan. '92



THE DRAGON TOKEN (Dragon Star #2) by Melanie Rawn

The flames of war continue to blaze across the land, the time for retreat has ended, and Prince Pol must rally his forces to halt the invaders' advance. But the invaders, too, have an agenda and they are readying a strike at the very heart of the Desert, stealing treasures which both Andry and Pol would pay any price to reclaim—even if the price should prove to be their own lives...

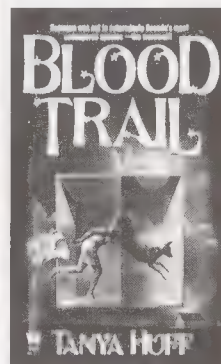
0-88677-493-4 Fantasy/Original \$20.00 (\$25.99 in Canada) Feb. '92



BLOOD TRAIL (Blood Price #2) by Tanya Huff

Only Henry Fitzroy, a Toronto-based vampire and writer of bodice rippers, and Vicki Nelson, ex-policewoman and now a private investigator, could save Canada's most endangered species—werewolves. But could even their combined talents prove enough to trace the blood trail of destruction to its source before it was too late?

0-88677-502-7 Fantasy/Original \$4.50 (\$4.99 in Canada) Feb. '92



DAW Books, Inc.

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Distributed by PENGUIN USA

STAND BY ME



Artwork by Rob Alexander

"Is there no shorter road to Iverno?" Alfrid asked, pushing his black hair from his eyes. It was not that he was so eager to get to Iverno as that he was eager to leave the plains Trusk and the wrecked hopes that were all that was left of Bertram's army. The revolt was over.

"There's the pass road. None uses it but in the direst extremity," the portly innkeeper answered, wiping his hands on his much-stained apron. "The signboard's gone, but half-mile up the road is a trace that leads to the hills. That's all that's left of the pass road."

"My thanks," said Alfrid, and inquired, "Why is it so little used, if it is so much shorter?"

"On account of the ghost at the top of the pass," was the reply. "There's an old gate-castle left over from when this used to be border country. It's haunted, they say, by a fearsome specter. None has gone that way unscathed for many a year."

The young horseman answered, "Again, my thanks; you have saved me three days journey to Iverno." He set his lean, well-featured face to the road, clucked to his horse, "Come, Grey," and twitched the reins, setting off at a quiet walk. His wiry yet strong frame moved at one with his horse. His armor, which wasted in a bundle behind the saddle, clinked in a gentle rhythm.

A half-mile down the road, he came to the trace. If the trees and bushes had been in leaf, he might have missed his turning. Breath steamed from the dappled grey's nostrils as he turned up the path. It would be easily lost if there were snow, but there should be no snow for a month or more.

Grey's hooves made soft rustles in the leaves, his shoes ringing on the occasional stone, as Alfrid mused on his recent past. Third sons have little hope of land, save through spectacular service to the king or revolt. He had chosen to back Bertram's revolt. With Bertram dead there had been no reason to fight on. He and many others had fled the field. He meant to cross the border at Iverno and try his luck in the Republics.

He pulled his cloak about him for better protection than his green and yellow tunic provided against the cold and the switching of brush along the trail. The way was much overgrown. He looked about him alertly. His great-great-grandfather had come from this region two hundred years ago. Where he had

by Glen & Connie Ten-Eyck

come from exactly was no longer remembered. All that he could recall was that his great-great-grandfather had fled from a tragic love affair.

In the forenoon, he came on a meadow of sere grass, good hay, surrounded by thickets. He dismounted and hobbled Grey, letting him graze. Alfrid strung up his bow and stalked about the edge of the meadow. His first shot, at a squirrel, missed, and a stone broke his arrow. He thriftily gathered the pieces. The head and feathers could be reused. His next shot killed a coney. He located the warren and shot one more. Two were enough for dinner.

His sword was not meant for a scythe but it served. He cut a good shock of hay and tied the bundle. He got some cord from a saddlebag and fastened it to the back of the saddle, saying to Grey, "You shan't go hungry this night, old friend, even if we camp among the stones of the summit." He removed the hobbles, took up the reins, and remounted.

Time passed swiftly. It was nearly sundown when he rounded a rocky shoulder and came to a long-abandoned crossroads. Just up the rugged hill was the old gate-castle. There was a wisp of smoke rising from one of the castle chimneys. His horse shied slightly, at nothing. Off to the side of the road was an old grave. A crossroads burial; suicide, like as not. The stone was too weathered to read.

He passed the stone and went on up to

the castle. As he got closer, he could see much disrepair. The years since it was abandoned had taken their toll. The wall and gate extending from the downhill side of the castle and across the road were still sound enough, though the gate stood open and the watchtower stared at the road from empty windows.

There was a path that led to the castle's main gate. That too was open. The portcullis had been drawn up and a baulk of timber braced under it so that it should not fall again. There was a family plot in the courtyard with both graves and a vault. Alfrid surmised that there was someone about, or the smoke was a liar.

"Hola, sir, what do you here?" a woman's voice called out sweetly.

"I seek shelter for the night," Alfrid answered. "I had not looked to find anyone here. I was warned not to stop near the top of the pass, but the darkness will come soon and the way down to Iverno looks steep."

"What then, you were warned of me? They said to watch out for Ara?" she asked lightly, showing him a heart-shaped face surrounded by a glow of light brown hair.

Sliding from Grey, he said, "Excuse my manners, I am Alfrid of Duchar. No, they did not warn me of you, they warned me of a ghost. I expect that it has something to do with the grave down at the crossroads."

She took Grey's reins and led him

toward a stable. "I have seen no ghost since I have been here," she said cheerfully, her blue dress rustling as she moved. They picked a stall, put the hay in the manger, and began to remove Grey's tack.

"Watch Grey's hooves," said Alfrid. "He won't hurt you, but he will put his foot gently on yours and watch innocently while you try to pull yours out from under."

"He is not the first horse with that trick," she replied, looking at him over Grey's withers. "I will pick up his fetlock if he tries it. He does like to be scratched behind the ears, doesn't he?"

"I have the saddle," said Alfrid. "You get the blanket. Thank you."

"How about you, Alfrid? Do you like being scratched behind the ears?" she asked with a giggle.

"Actually, under the corners of the jaw is better," he laughed.

They talked quietly on, eyes meeting often. Their talk was full of inconsequentials and laughter. By the time that Grey was fed and curried they were talking like old friends.

As they went to the main hall, where Ara mostly stayed, Alfrid admired her necklace of blue stones with a softly glowing red stone pendant. "It is an old one, that I was given years ago. Alas, it is false, like the one that gave it. Were it real, I would have no need to stay where the rent is naught."

They fixed a small supper with her vegetables and bread and his coney. "Sit, my lady, and I will serve you. It is only right that the lady of the castle should be served at her own table." He brought the bowl of rabbit stew and with the flourishes proper to a high court lady, served it into a hollowed-out loaf of bread on her plate. He served himself also, poured water for them both, and sat.

Their dinner was filled with pleasantries and a quiet happiness like none that Alfrid had ever known before. Afterwards they took seats by the great fireplace and played chess and talked the hours away. They stroked each other's hands lovingly and spoke quietly of hopes and aspirations that neither had ever expressed before.

Alfrid took on a more serious look. "My lady Ara," he began, "I had intended to go to Iverno and there cross the Dann into the Republics. This plan is now a wreck. I have need to know some



Artwork by Rob Alexander

things, and the answers will not wait."

She looked him full in his serious brown eyes, the candlelight striking green from hers. "Ask then, and I will answer what I may."

"Who are your folk and where are they?" he asked, leaning forward and taking her hand. "I have been struck to the heart by you, and I would ask for your hand in marriage if I am not too forward."

"My folk may not answer for me. They are all in Heaven, or, though I shame

myself by so hoping, in Hell," she replied quietly, with downcast eyes.

"You are entirely alone in this world? Then you yourself may answer my entreaty," he leaned closer and clasped her hand to his heart. "Will you accept the hand of a landless third son? I have as little to offer as you have. I can offer you only my true heart."

"Sir, I cannot accept your suit at this time," she answered, pulling her hand back gently. "I must know you better. I believe that I also love you. Neither land

nor income mean anything. The man who has my hand must stand by me, unconditionally. None has ever done so. For this I have waited longer than you can believe.

"Your name, Alfrid, is also a difficulty. It is the name of the man who dishonored me. He fled my father's wrath. I thought him killed. Instead, he took a payment and ran."

"I understand your distaste," pled Alfrid, "but there can be no connection. I was named for my great-great-grandfather. He did come from this region, but that was two hundred years ago."

"That the man who left you was a dastard is beyond question. I am not he. Whatever may happen, I will stand by you. I pledge this upon my soul."

Rising and walking to the staircase to the upper floors of the keep, Ara said, "Come then, and prove your words. You shall have the chamber beyond mine."

Catching up with her, candle in hand, Alfrid said intensely, "My name is a common one. I was named for a man two hundred years dead. I cannot make up what some man with my name did to you. I can stand by you, come what may. That I will do."

Turning to him at her door, she said quietly, "I still love him. I never thought to love another, until today. Let us see what time will bring. Sleep you well."

Only slightly downcast, Alfrid went to his chamber. The room had a small chest, a bed, and a washstand. He saw no blankets. He could use his cloak. He had before. He took off his boots and, standing barefoot on the cold stones, placed his dagger at the head of the bed. He lay down, wrapped in his cloak, and tried to sleep. He was still fitful when midnight came. He heard Ara's door open.

Like a bad dream, he heard a snapping twang. He had heard that sound before, at a hanging, when the body hit the end of the rope. Seizing his dagger, he rushed to the hall door, weapon upraised to defend or avenge her.

He was confronted by a horrid specter. Its head lolled on a broken neck with a rope about it that stretched up and faded away. It had nails like great claws, empty sockets with a pale glow in them, and wild, unnaturally long floating hair. It floated several feet off the floor and seemed to fade out of sight at the edges. Nearly hidden in its swirling robes was a necklace with blue stones and a red center stone.

It moaned, low and rising to a shriek. Menacing him with its claws, it rushed

him. Dropping his dagger and shaking with fear he stood his ground. Terrified and grieving, he reached out and embraced the dreadful shade. "My lady," he sobbed through tears, "it was my ancestor who dishonored you, was it not? And I am too late for our love by some two hundred years."

The apparition floated free of him and down the stair. Barefoot, he followed. Out the main hall door it passed, and through the courtyard, pursued by Alfrid. It was biting cold, with frost on the ground sparkling in the moonlight. Undeterred, he sped after the ghost that fled ever before him.

At last it came to the crossroads and stood over the lonely suicide's grave. As Alfrid approached, it seeped into the grave and vanished.

Shaking with cold, grief, and horror, Alfrid returned to the castle to await the daylight. At last his vigil was done. The sun cast feeble rays through the overcast. In his mourning and sorrow he had thought how best he could honor his oath.

He cast about for a spade in the old dilapidated stable. Taking the spade and a spare cloak from his duffel, he went down the hill to the isolated grave. Where the phantom of his love had vanished, he began to dig in the unhallowed earth.

It was his thought to end her poor, tormented soul's unquiet rest. Soon, he found the remains of a long decayed coffin. Working with care, he exhumed the bones that were all that was left of the doomed lady who had hung herself at his ancestor's betrayal. The blue and red necklace was there, too, and was placed reverently on his spare cloak with her bones.

Knowing that the family plot would be consecrated ground, he took her there. Laying aside his precious burden, he chose a spot and began to dig. His hair prickled up at what happened then.

As he turned up each clod, the hole filled back in as soon as the dirt fell from the spade. After several futile minutes of wasted work and rising anger, he growled at the assorted graves, "You miserable fiends, she will have rest though all your unforgiving souls have none."

He took off his own cloak and laid it next to his chosen grave site. The next mould that he shoveled out of the hole went onto the cloak and stayed there. Before long, the new grave was ready, lacking only a marker. Stone was out of the question. He knew not the working of it. Instead, he chose a well-seasoned

board from the stable. It took a few hours to carve it to his satisfaction.

Planted before the grave, it said, "Ara, betrayed in love, yet truly loved. Rest in sweet peace."

Placing her bones carefully in the grave, he filled it over, weeping as he did so. "Farewell, my lovely Ara. Have now the rest you have so long been denied. You are truly loved, even though two hundred years stand between us," he whispered huskily. Falling to his knees, he prayed for the peace of her soul.

Alfrid spent the next three days in fasting and prayer. He found the castle's chapel and cleared it out so that he could pray there. All of his prayers were for Ara's peace. His own troubled soul and its grief he paid not one prayer. At last his vigil of prayer was finished.

Gathering up his few possessions, he went to the stable to saddle up Grey. A cheerful singing greeted his ears.

There in the stable was Ara, already saddling Grey and singing like an angel. "But, I don't understand," he stammered. "I have laid you to rest in consecrated ground. I have prayed for your peace."

"Yes," she said cheerfully, "and it ended my walking as a suicide's spirit. As a suicide, I had to stay where I died and was buried. I had to show the horror of my death to all. I have the peace you prayed for. Suicide is not the only reason that a spirit can walk. Only you saw the love behind the horror."

"You mean that you still can't rest?" he asked sadly. "Is there more I must do for you?"

"Never stop loving me," she replied.

His heart soared as he heard her next words, from the ancient rite of marriage, "Whither thou goest, there I go. Now I have the peace that I prayed for, so long as you stand by me."

GLEN AND CONNIE TEN-EYCK live in Portland, OR, in an apartment full of plants. They share their home with a cockatiel named Lord Byrdkins of Bolingbroke. He is fond of potato chips and manuscript pages. They are fond of the S.C.A. and are active in the kingdom of An Tir. They are occasional con-goers, mostly to Orycon.

"Stand By Me" is their second story to see print.

ROB ALEXANDER is a talented newcomer from Seattle. You will see his work again soon in these pages.

THE FROG PRINCE

by Marella Sands

I first saw him looking intently at his reflection in a small pool in the forest. At least, I thought he was looking at his reflection — that's what *I* would do in similar circumstances — but when I got closer, it appeared he was really looking at a rather small frog. I stifled a scream. Frogs, of course, are one of the things princesses just *cannot* abide.

Now, you may be wondering what a princess is doing wandering around the forest, especially if she's going to scream at every horrid slimy thing it contains, but let it suffice to say that if I put my mind to something, nothing gets in my way; forests, guardsmen, and parents included.

The man was dressed in finery of a century past, but that wasn't unusual

among noble families which had seen better days. In fact, most noble families haven't seen better days lately. As a princess, I was not supposed to worry about such things, even in private, but I did worry quite a lot. You see, princesses can only marry young men of equal or nearly equal social position, and since the nobility was crumbling, such men were getting harder and harder to find. Hence my interest in the young man at the pond.

He didn't notice my approach until he saw my reflection behind his, which startled him enough to send him jumping up and into the pond, fortunately frightening away the slimy little frog. These acrobatics immediately put a damper on any possible relationship we

might have. Young men who are to marry princesses must not startle, either — and they certainly must not splash about in ponds, sending dirty water and green pond-scum onto a princess's dress and shoes.

The situation did not get any better very quickly. The young man, who was very attractive even when wet — a fact I certainly did not fail to note — continued to sit in the pond and look about, apparently for the frog, without once attempting to rise and make a courtly bow. Eventually, however, he did pick himself up and wade out of the pond. He did not look at me. This rudeness embarrassed and angered me, and I was so flustered I didn't know whether to just stand there and blush or to stomp away in a huff.



Artwork by Gus diZerega

Let me say here that it is perfectly all right for princesses to become flustered. In fact, we are expected to become very good at it.

Before I could decide between standing or stomping, the young man turned and walked away.

Now this was a very rude thing to do, especially to a princess, and so I decided to follow him and tell him a thing or two about proper behavior. Following him turned out to be harder than I expected. The young man kept a swift pace so that I was running while he seemed to be striding along quite easily. Eventually, he stopped in a clearing that was not supposed to be there. No one is allowed to live within the king's forest. Appar-

ently I needed to tell this young man a thing or two about the king's law as well.

He didn't even invite me into the cottage, so I went in anyway. I am allowed to go anywhere in the kingdom I wish, illegal cottages being no exception. The young man paid me no attention as he changed clothes.

Being brought up in a *proper* household, I, of course, had never seen a man undress in front of me. I started to blush, and blushing does not complement my pale complexion at all. A blush combined with my fiery red hair makes me look dreadful. I would have told the young man to have better manners, but I decided I should turn away so he

couldn't see me at less than my best. But there was no need to turn away *too* quickly.

When I judged that my blush had subsided, I turned back around to confront the young man, who had changed into another set of clothes as fine as the first.

I coughed (politely), and the young man finally looked in my direction. He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Then he raised a hand to his throat and shook his head. So. He was mute. Well, there was no rule that said the man who will marry a princess must be an expert in witty conversation. There was no rule that even said he had to talk!

The young man pointed at the door. When it became obvious that I was going nowhere — how dare he assume I could be ushered out like a servant! — the young man came over and took my arm and attempted to shove me out the door.

Well, no one had ever dared lay hands on me before, and I wasn't quite sure how to react. I couldn't scream and claw his eyes out, because he seemed to be of noble birth and it wouldn't do to treat him like a peasant. So I simply refused to move. Eventually, he released me, threw his hands up in the air, and glared at me.

I did the next best thing to attempting witty conversation. I smiled prettily and lowered my eyes. No one, not even my father, is immune to my smiles.

The young man appeared to be immune.

After a few moments, he walked away — and no man living has ever walked away from me when I am being charming — and returned with a wooden bowl. I looked around, but saw no fire, and I wondered just how he would cook me a meal. When I looked back, the young man was sitting at the table and eating something from his bowl. Although I was horribly outraged that he would not invite me to sit or serve me as he should, and *especially* that he would actually eat and not offer me any food, I decided that cooperation might accent my charm. After all, perhaps he only had the one bowl, and perhaps he just didn't know that one should always serve a princess before oneself.

"What is it you are eating?" I asked, hoping that, even if he couldn't speak, he would attempt to communicate *something*.

He only looked at me briefly. I decided to try again.

"Why were you looking at that horrid frog by the pond earlier?"

This time he gestured out the door, and I saw several frogs sitting outside looking in. I shuddered and hoped the young man would prevent them from entering the cottage.

After a while, when it became evident that he would attempt no more communication, I took it upon myself to do so.

"Young man, what is your name?"

He hesitated.

"Rory," he said. I was shocked that he had apparently been playing with me before, but I quickly remembered that I was attempting cooperation.

"Rory," I said, "why didn't you speak to me before?"

He only shook his head. I glared at him, but his expression was so mournful I decided maybe he wasn't playing with me.

"You can't speak all the time?"

He nodded.

"You can only speak at certain times?"

He nodded again.

Suddenly, it came to me.

"I know! Your fairy godmother forgot to come to your christening, and so she never cast a spell protecting you from evil witches, and when you turned seventeen, your dashing white steed spoke to you and told you that an evil witch had cursed you with silence, and that you should not be released until a princess learns how to break the evil spell."

I had to stop and catch my breath. It sounded exciting enough, especially considering I had just made it up.

The young man shrugged. Well, maybe I had it partly right.

"How about the curse part? Is that right?"

He nodded. I fairly fainted with delight: a cursed prince, doomed to wander the world in silence until a princess figured out how to release him. What a stroke of luck!

Before I could pursue the conversa-

tion, the young man stood up and once more attempted to make me leave. When I refused to move, he tried to pick me up, but it is hard to pick up a person wearing fifteen underskirts if she doesn't wish to be picked up. Eventually he gave up and glared at me again.

I tried the next best thing to smiling prettily. I pouted.

Rory was immune. I was not surprised.

He then went to the narrow cot next to the far wall, and lay down to sleep. That he did not plan to escort me home insulted me greatly, and I almost left in a huff. But a princess never admits defeat so easily.

I studied him for several minutes, trying to plan my next move and to recover from the knowledge that this man was totally unaffected by me. My beauty, charm, poise, and sophistication left him underwhelmed. I had never met a man like him before. Thinking of the simpleminded sons of the nobility, I knew I never would again. I could see opportunity present, if I could only find some way to take advantage of it.

I decided to see if I could seduce him. You may be wondering what a princess knows about seduction — and indeed, I never had tried it before, there never having been need — but rest assured that along with smiling and pouting, princesses are taught seducing. One never knows when it will come in handy. Besides, if I could manage it, there would be no place in the kingdom for him to escape my father, and matrimony. If such things seem too worldly for princesses to worry about, you're wrong. Finding and keeping a husband are the only worries princesses have.

As I got close to him, he curled up into a ball. Now, I was not about to be put off so easily. I continued.

There wasn't much room on the cot for me and my dress, and I would have

discarded it except I had no maidservants to help me out of the thing. I struggled with it for a few minutes, but had no luck. I'd just have to work the seduction around the dress.

The young man had uncurled himself to watch me fight with my dress, and I, not about to waste the golden opportunity, leaned over quickly to kiss him on the lips.

The room spun crazily and I wondered if this was a result of the kiss, missing dinner, or the breaking of the evil spell. I looked around, and everything looked different, as if I were in another cottage.

A giant leaned over me, and I tried to scream, but only a croak escaped me. The giant picked me up and brought me close to his face. I struggled frantically. Being eaten by a giant is certainly one fate that a princess attempts to avoid at all costs, but to no avail.

After a while, I stopped struggling and looked more closely at the awful giant. I let out a squeak of surprise. It was Rory. I wanted to rant and rave, and demand that he release me, but I seemed to have lost my voice. Only strange croaks and peepings issued forth from my mouth.

Rory looked very sad. In fact, he was crying.

"I'll take you to the pond now," he said. He patted me on the head. "Princess one hundred and thirty-two."

MARELLA SANDS was born and raised in St. Louis, MO, and continues to make her home there. She was awarded a Master's Degree in Anthropology from Kent State University. Her only previous sale was a poem, "The Dark", to Volume 1 of *Fresh Ink*. Currently, she shares her space with a two-year old pet iguana named Peabody.



Artwork by Gus diZerega

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S FANTASY MAGAZINE IS AVAILABLE FROM THESE VENDORS
(listed in order by state or province)

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND:
FANTAST (MEDWAY) LTD.

LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA:
MULTI-MAG

TORONTO
BAKKA SF BOOK SHOPPE

GLENDALE, ARIZONA:
OUT OF THIS WORLD
BOOKSERVICE

TEMPE:
ONE BOOK SHOP

TUCSON:
ANTIGONE BOOKS

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA:
AVENUE BOOKS

CODY'S BOOKS
DARK CARNIVAL
DAVE'S SMOKE SHOP
THE OTHER CHANGE OF
HOBBIT

CARLSBAD:
MYSTICAL DRAGON

EMERYVILLE:
DIESEL, A BOOKSTORE

LONG BEACH:
RICHARD KYLE BOOKS

LOS ANGELES:
SISTERHOOD BOOKSTORE

MENLO PARK:
KEPLER'S BOOKS

NEWARK:
GENNY'S BOOK NOOK

OAKLAND:
MAMA BEARS
WALDEN POND BOOKS

PALO ALTO:
FUTURE FANTASY

SACRAMENTO:
TOWER BOOKS

SAN FRANCISCO:
OLD WIVES' TALES
TALL STORIES

SHERMAN OAKS:
DANGEROUS VISIONS

STOCKTON:
AVENUE BOOKS

SAN JOSE:
SISTERSPIRIT

WASHINGTON, D.C.:
LAMMAS BOOK STORE

ATLANTA, GEORGIA:
SCIENCE FICTION & MYSTERY
BOOKS

POLK CITY, IOWA:
CHRIS DRUMM BOOKS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS:
CHICAGO MAIN NEWSSTAND
WOMEN & CHILDREN FIRST

OAK FOREST:
WEINBERG BOOKS

URBANA:
BOOK CENTER AT ILLINI
UNION

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA:
MYSTIC MOON

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS:
AVENUE VICTOR HUGO
BOOKSHOP

PITTSFIELD:
CRYSTAL WORKS

WORCESTER:
FABULOUS FICTION
BOOKSTORE

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND:
TALES FROM THE WHITE HART

ROCKVILLE:
ROBERT A. MADLE SCIENCE
FICTION BOOKS

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN:
COMMUNITY NEWSCENTER

EAST LANSING:
CURIOUS BOOK SHOP

KALAMAZOO:
PANDORA WOMYN'S
BOOKSTORE

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA:
AMAZON BOOKSTORE

ROLLA, MISSOURI:
BOOKS 'N THINGS

ST. LOUIS:
THE DRAGON NEVER SLEEPS

RALEIGH, N. CAROLINA:
DJ'S COLLEGE BOOK & NEWS

LA VISTA, NEBRASKA:
STAR REALM

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY:
COMIC ATTITUDES

NEW YORK, NEW YORK:
FORBIDDEN PLANET
SCIENCE FICTION SHOP

BANDON, OREGON:
SWORDS AND STARS

EUGENE:
ESCAPE BOOKS

PORTLAND:
FUTURE DREAMS
LOOKING GLASS BOOKSTORE

POWELL'S BOOKS

FEASTERVILLE,
PENNSYLVANIA:
GLOBAL BOOKS

ARLINGTON, TEXAS:
LONE STAR COMICS

HOUSTON:
FUTURE VISIONS

EVERETT, WASHINGTON:
PORT GARDNER BAY BOOKS

LYNDEN:
WHITE DWARF BOOKS

SEATTLE:
BULLDOG NEWS
UNIVERSITY BOOKSTORE
WONDERWORLD BOOKS

TACOMA:
LADY JAYNE'S
O'LEARY'S BOOKS

Letters

SPELL BOUND

(Yvonne) Robin McGrew, Las Vegas, NV

Please consider this a response to your editorial of Issue #13. In it you state, "Good spellers are born, not made"; I beg to differ. You see, I am dyslexic, not the average variety where certain letters are inverted or reversed, rather a rare form where many of the thought processes are reversed. In short, I often think backwards. Through the years I have learned to make this an advantage for me; coming through the back door gives one a unique perspective on a problem. The situation has, however, presented me much difficulty in spelling and grammar. Which brings me to a second statement which appears on page 41, "a beginning writer doesn't need a word processor". You see, it was through my word processor that I have achieved my current competence in spelling. The machine has served (with an on-line spell checker) to tell me every time I mis-spelled a word. After sufficient repetition, I no longer make that particular error...With respect, some of us can and must work our way into good spelling. The word processor is often a strong aid in achieving this goal.

Good point! And I'm impressed that you've had the determination to work through your verbal disability. I'm sure there are others who will take encouragement from your example. I still believe that the beginning writer need not be deterred by the lack of a word processor or the money to buy one, though. Friends can be very good spell-checkers. After all, I wrote my first thirty books on a corner of the kitchen table with an old standard typewriter and a little help from my friends. - MZB

TURNING THE CRANK

Priscilla W. Armstrong, Baltimore, MD

Marion, I'd like to add something to your wonderful article on excuses for not writing...I was raised in a clergy family in Vermont. One thing our parents...insisted upon was that work

be finished before we could play. Reading (except for school, of course) was "play" (when I was in my fifties my mother was still saying..."since you aren't doing anything, could you..." when I was reading). Writing, of course, was a recreational activity, not to be indulged in until everything else was done. The guilt involved in writing when there are dishes to be washed, or beds to make, or meals to prepare, or housework to be finished, is considerable. Avoiding the guilt produces extra excuses right and left, things one "ought" to do which eats up time which could be spent writing.

Fortunately I have a husband who is observant. He will sometimes say, "You are getting cranky. You haven't been writing, have you? Never mind anything, just write."

So, when you're not writing, you're "Only a word in a guilty rage"?? And yes, Marion gets pretty cranky when she doesn't write, too!.- JAR

I didn't think anybody noticed...- MZB

A WELL-DESERVED PAT ON THE BACK...

Mary K. Frey, Fayetteville, PA

Rachel, Issue #12 arrived today, and I went through it with an eager eye to see what "new" look a managing editor would bring to it...First, I am extremely pleased at the wide variety of artists...I like to see the artist's name right next to the work, too. How about a smaller font, though, so the identification doesn't draw my eye out of the story...?

I also like the ... information about author and artist immediately after each story... There are finally (hurrah!) no "continued on page X" stories...I am not thrilled with the "mythical creatures" clipart...(and) this cover was not one of my favorites...Despite a couple of my comments, I really do like the way Issue #12 looks. I'm looking forward to future issues.

We think Rachel is pretty special, both as a managing editor and as a human being. We're very lucky to have her. - MZB

BELATED WELCOME ABOARD

Deborah Wheeler, Mar Vista, CA

A belated good-bye and many-thanks-job-well-done to Jan Burke and welcome-aboard to Rachel. The changing of the guard, er — managing editor — was accomplished while I was on a 6-month personal sabbatical with my family in Lyon, France. Besides the experience of living in another culture, one which seeks to preserve its patrimony rather than create its future, as well as speaking one language at home and another in the street (private and public languages), I had some interesting adventures with books. Books are relatively expensive in France (paperbacks cost about \$7.00 and anything in English is much more). There are a few French SF writers but very little fantasy. American and English writers are available in translation — I saw *MISTS OF AVALON* and a very handsome boxed set of the Darkover volumes in a number of bookstores. (The French are also kooky over Philip K. Dick.)

Like you, Marion, I was less than thrilled by Disney's *MERMAID*. I found it trivial, gutless, and cutesy. Our pop culture tries to hide children from natural events and choices, but gives them no protection from drive-by gang shootings and serial murderers. True fantasy encompasses both Light and Dark. It gives us the tools to find our way through them, to seek a balanced whole. Rather than being an "escape", fantasy has the power to transform our vision, to take us beyond our everyday lives and to illuminate deeper layers of wisdom. We can't understand these things with our ordinary intellect, which is why the great teachers have always used symbol, myth, and parable. As Marion says, people are still reading *THE ODYSSEY* and *BEOWULF*, and will continue to do so for centuries to come.

Welcome home, Deborah — and congratulations on selling your first novel! I couldn't agree with you more about your comments concerning "THE LITTLE MERMAID". Originally, fairy tales acquainted children with danger, and taught them important lessons such as "life isn't always sweetness and light", "the good guys sometimes lose", and "people often live rather unhappily ever after". - MZB

YA GOTTA HAVE 'ART...

E.R. Stewart, Robins AFB, GA

The cover and interior illustrations of Issue #12 are superb, the best ever. Writing a cheer had occurred to me even before I encountered Rachel Holmen's *LAST WORD*, and that convinced me, because such efforts should be recognized. Way to go, REH.

A particular favorite is the moody, flowing picture on page 21, by Shirley Jowise. It strikes an intriguing balance between life and dream, or fantasy and reality, and evokes the exact right mood for the story it illustrates.

Elsewhere, on pp. 48, 49, and 50, Barb Armata displays a mastery of pen-and-ink technique that can only be envied, while on page 11 Alan Giana, as noted in the small biography, does indeed create a modern mood, with his mix of clean lines, bold shadows, and pointillism.

In any case, I flat couldn't resist sending off some praise; *MZB's Fantasy Magazine* is not only the most interesting magazine around, it's one of the best-looking, and it's getting better all this time. Let's all hope that Rachel Holmen's many contacts and solicited artists come through for her at least this well with each subsequent issue. As a showcase for fine fiction and

dramatic art, this publication is now the one to beat.

Rachel prowls the convention art shows, searching for the best of the best. We think she's finding it, and we're glad you think so, too. And, of course, we'll pass your kind words on to our talented, hard-working artists for whom "deadline" is often a four-letter word. - JAR

PILED HIGHER AND DEEPER (WITH FANTASY)...

Lisa M. Orick, Albuquerque, NM

I wrote to you a year ago and told you that I was on a tight budget because I was working on my MA in communication and that I budgeted the money for your magazine. Well, I finished my MA and I am now working on a PhD at UNM, and I'm still budgeting my money! However, your magazine is a necessity as an escape from dry textbooks and a hectic student's life, for this I thank you!

I also wanted to tell you how much I enjoy your magazines and your books. My only complaint is that you don't put new ones out fast enough!

Keep up the wonderful writing and editing, and I'll keep up with the reading!

Thank you for the kind words. Lisa. We're sorry to say that we'll be raising our subscription prices as of January 1, 1992, but if you renew right now, you can extend your subscription through the rest of your time in school at the old rate. - REH

SHOULD INTERVIEWERS IMPOSE THEIR OPINIONS?

Douglas Lent, Wareham, MA

I liked the Pat Murphy interview (again, keep this feature, I enjoy reading about all you folks on the other side of the "writer to reader" process). One odd thing, however. The interview read well enough, but as I went through it I found the occasional comment from the interviewers which suggested they had their own agenda. Nothing too sinister, just signs of a syndrome I've noticed among other critics, especially those two from Chicago with the TV show. One instant all seemed normal, and then you hear them telling "how this movie *should* have been made", rather than dealing with how the movie *was* made. The Murphy interviewers seemed to be saying how Murphy *should* have written some of her stories, rather than dealing with the way they *were* written.

Having and expressing opinions is human. I even have a few LITTLE ones, myself. And I even express them, but ONLY OCCASIONALLY when I think nobody's looking... - MZB

Wanna buy a bridge? - JAR

KELLY IS THE GREATEST, BARR NONE...

George Barr, San Jose, CA

I received the latest issue last week and it looks so good that I'm jealous as hell at not being in it. Kelly is still working magic.

So are you, George. And we'll be seeing lots more of your wonderful pieces in upcoming issues.. In fact, your "boy kissing frog" in this issue is just great! - REH



Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

Twenty Peasants

by Barton Paul Levinson

with apologies to Bernard Williams

Harko and Kiriell fought like demons till the bodies of their hideous troll attackers were piled about them like cordwood, but they were disarmed at last and brought before the troll commander, Dammontrag the Unspeakable. The burly guards forced them to kneel at his feet.

Incongruously, the huge troll wore the robes of a Senator of the Old Empire, and one scaly, clawed hand tapped a scroll against his chair's arm rest. Clearly Dammontrag fancied himself an intellectual.

"Unloose their gags," he commanded. A guard slid his claw down Harko's gag, splitting it, then did the same for Kiriell. "So, the warrior monk and his woman friend are in my power," rumbled the troll captain. "How delightful!"

Kiriell wore the wolf's-tooth necklace and fur bikini of her savage tribe. "I challenge you to single combat, spawn of dogs!" she said. "With weapons or without as you choose!"

"If I have any use for you, my pretty, I assure you it won't be for combat," leered the troll. "At least, not the sort you're thinking of."

"Touch her and you'll answer to me, you fiend," warned Harko in his deep bass voice. Muscles bulged and rippled under his war harness.

The troll drew back in mock alarm. "Such gallantry," he added. "But let us address ourselves to the issue at hand. You, monk, are supposed to be a Chris-

tian, despite your obvious lack of chastity."

"I am," stated Harko.

"You oppose the plans of my evil master, Axxtron, King of Trolls, to extend his empire to all the known world."

"I do."

"And you think you'll win out over the combined might of our invincible armies?"

"I will."

Dammontrag shook his head. "You amaze me."

"I do."

"Stop that." The troll frowned and held one fist in the other, squinting at Harko over his hairy hands. "Suppose I were to prove to you that our final victory was not only historically inevitable, but, in fact, ethically right and therefore desirable whether it is inevitable or not?"

Harko blinked. "If you could prove that, troll, I would join your cause."

"Excellent!" hissed Dammontrag. His eyes lit up and he smacked one hamlike fist into the other hand, then frowned at the crushed manuscript.

"Harko!" cried the wolf-girl. "Surely you of all men would not serve the Lord of Foulness!"

Harko grinned at her. "Rest at ease, Kiriell. To do what he says this troll would have to prove that black is white, that up is down, and that you are not the loveliest woman in all the Free Kingdoms."

"Enough of this chatter," said the troll. "Let me begin by pointing out the obvious advantages of a single world empire.

Firstly, there would be an end to war, since no other governments would survive to be at war with."

Harko frowned. "Your empire would seethe with internal revolt as one conquered people after another rose up in hatred of their conquerors."

"Nevertheless, that would be a matter for the police, not the army."

"You propose to define your way out of the problem?"

Dammontrag waved a hand impatiently. "I submit to you that there would be fewer humans and trolls suffering under the situation I describe than under the present state of world affairs. Can you honestly disagree with that?"

Harko frowned again. He wanted to rub a hand thoughtfully over his mouth, but his hands were still bound behind his back. He spoke cautiously. "Even granting your point, you are using cruel and sinful methods to achieve your goal — wars of conquest, the invasion of neutral countries, broken treaties, torture of prisoners, the ravishing of innocent women by hideous monsters—"

"But all that will end when the war ends," insisted Dammontrag. "However great the finite suffering while this war goes on — and let me point out that it could be ended at once if the so-called Free Kingdoms would submit—it would pale into insignificance when set against the countless ages of peace and progress to come."

"It doesn't matter," said Harko. "The end doesn't justify the means."

Dammontrag leaped from his chair to seize Harko by his massive shoulders. "Yes it does, Harko, yes it does! Look at yourself! Doesn't your Bible say that killing is wrong? Don't you call your Christ the Prince of Peace? And yet you wear the magical broadsword, Nordenkleaver, and cut down as many as fifty of my warriors a day. Doesn't killing a troll count as killing? Isn't it obvious that killing is usually wrong, but that an exception is made for killing in self-defense or defense of another? What is such an exception but a tacit acknowledgment that the end justifies the means, that the desirable end of self-defense or defense of another justifies the use of a means normally considered unlawful?"

Harko hesitated. "Every person has a right to life, but that right is not absolute. It is dispensed with by attacking another. A murderer or an invading soldier is in a state of moral guilt for which killing him may be not only justifiable, but in fact mandatory."

"But isn't that just what I said?"

The warrior monk shook his head. "The question of guilt or innocence is crucial to my belief, and makes no difference to yours. I will kill a guilty person if the situation demands it. I will not kill an innocent one."

"We'll see about that!" shrieked the troll. "I say you *do* think the end justifies the means, and I mean to prove it!" He let go of Harko's shoulders and whirled to face his subordinates. "Take them to the village square!" He chuckled evilly as the



Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

burly guards dragged Harko and Kiriell to their feet.

The town of Kleindorf was burning. The troll soldiers marched the warrior monk and the wolf-girl down narrow, soot-filled alleys between smoking peasant huts. All around them, the crackle of flames mingled with the screams and shrieks of the dying. Bodies of villagers lay in doorways, where they had been cut down by Dammontrag's shock troops, and the smell of blood mingled with the choking fumes of wood smoke.

The small shops ringing the village square were a shambles, but the commons were almost clear. Several peasants cowered in a group near the far end of the little meadow as troll soldiers herded them back at swordpoint. The officers snapped to attention as Dammontrag approached, those with sword in hand nearly decapitating themselves. "Hail, Dammontrag, Captain of Trolls," rasped a troll Sergeant.

Dammontrag reached to his waist and drew forth a cigarette holder from his belt, a smoldering cigarette already in place. He puffed on it and blew a smoke ring in the Sergeant's face. "Are they twenty in number?" he asked.

"Aye aye, Captain. As many as I have fingers and thumb on one hand, and again, and again, and again, and again." The troll held up a hand with one thumb and three fingers.

"Excellent," hissed the troll captain. He turned to face Harko. "I have here twenty peasants: men, women and children. I intend to gut every one of them before your eyes."

"Coward!" cried Kiriell. "You are no soldier, but a butcher! Nay, a carrion crow! Nay, two carrion crows! Three carrion crows, and a dead rat! Four—"

"Gag her," ordered Dammontrag, and the guards did so.

"Do not do this thing, Dammontrag," said Harko.

The troll nodded. "I will let nineteen of them go free — if, and only if, you will gut the twentieth." He signalled the guards, and they unbound Harko's right arm and handed him a curved trollish short-sword.

Harko stared at the sword as if he had never seen one before. He looked up at the peasants. Men and women alike wore homespun tunics and sandals. The women had kerchiefs. One held a baby, and it cried faintly until she rocked it and shushed it fearfully. They all watched Harko, wondering what he would do.

"Mm fm ah-um ih!" cried Kiriell behind her gag. "Mm fm ah-um ih!"

Dammontrag raised one pointed eyebrow. "Let her speak."

A troll soldier undid the gag again. "Ask for a volunteer," said Kiriell.

Harko looked at her, then looked back at the peasants. "No," he said. "I can't!"

"Think," urged Dammontrag. "Think what you're saying. There are only two possible choices. One peasant dies — or twenty. Which will it be?"

"I can't," said Harko.

"You can't choose?"

Harko shook his head.

Dammontrag puffed out his hairy cheeks, sighing. "You are saying that one life is the equivalent of twenty lives. One equals twenty, according to what you're saying."

"No," said Harko. "You don't understand." He licked his lips, grateful that the moment had turned to talk again. "It's wrong to murder an innocent person, whatever good that would achieve. The act is wrong in itself, immoral."

Dammontrag blinked. "You're worried about your own guilt?"

"Among other things..."

"In order to protect your own moral sensibilities you're willing to watch twenty people die? Twenty deaths, so you won't have to soil your own little pink hands." The troll captain smiled. "The choice is between being guilty of one death and being guilty of twenty. I, myself, would find that quite an easy choice."

Again Harko shook his head. "I will not be guilty of any deaths — you will be guilty. You're doing the killing."

"I think you're splitting hairs. As a result of a choice you will make, one peasant dies, or twenty will."

"No," said Harko. "The guilt belongs to the one who commits the act. I'm not forcing you to kill these people. I told you not to. And I tell you again: Do not do this."

Dammontrag set his lips tightly. He looked at the quaking peasants, then back at Harko. "Twenty-two deaths, monk. I will kill you and the woman and the twenty peasants if you don't kill one of them. Kill a peasant and join us! Refuse and die, and die with twenty-one other deaths on your conscience! That is your only alternative!"

Harko smiled. "Go to hell," he said. And he dropped the sword on the ground.

A week later found Harko and Kiriell sitting at their ease in the famous Avis et

Infans, the inn, cafe, and brothel run by Mother Jasmyn in the City of Three Rivers. Her kindly old Auntie brought them their drinks. It was late, with a fire of pine logs roaring in the great fireplace, and most of the customers had passed out over their ale.

"Lucky we were that your twin half-brother came over the hill when he did," mused Kiriell. She sipped at her grasshopper — mixed drinks were one of the few habits of city-dwellers she did not despise.

Harko nodded thoughtfully, staring off toward the fireplace. He had not touched his brandy Alexander.

"You were bluffing, weren't you?" continued Kiriell. "You must have known the cavalry were coming — you wouldn't really have meekly submitted to death for the sake of one peasant, would you?"

Harko looked at her and smiled, but did not answer.

BARTON PAUL LEVINSON has worked as a palette stacker, greensman, janitor, grill cook, file clerk, messenger, mover, and typist, but now programs computers for a consulting firm and writes, dreaming of that big paperback contract that will enable him to stop doing real work. He is married, a born-again Christian, and a registered Libertarian.

MARGARET ORGAN-KEAN studied art and art history at Boston University, Central Washington University, and University of Washington. She has been a professional illustrator since she was fifteen.

Fandom? "I was raised on it," she tells us. Her mother was a librarian, and Margaret read a lot of fantasy as a child. She attended her first convention in 1986.

She works as a tech writer and systems analyst. "We all double up," she says.

The Bakery Men Don't See

A cookbook featuring more than sixty recipes, tips, and baking stories by sf pros and fans.

All proceeds donated to the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, a new sf award for gender-bending sf & fantasy.

\$10 per copy plus postage (\$1 North America, \$3 Other).

Make checks payable to:

SF3, Box 1624

Madison, WI 53701-1624

Witchcraft, Wicked Witchcraft

by Kate Hoppe

First of all, I hate undressing in front of other people. When I signed up for aerobics at the Y that time, I'd come home wearing my sweaty leotard rather than change in the locker room. Secondly, I'm not religious. Granted, every once in a while I'll say a prayer. When I'm desperate, I usually have a heart-to-heart talk with Jude, patron of the impossible, but that's about it. Given these circumstances I declined the invitation to join the coven when I lived uptown. I couldn't see myself praying to gods and goddesses I didn't know while dancing around without my clothes. So I decided to become a witch on my own.

I became interested in witchcraft because I needed power, and witchcraft is the only way I know to get it. I work at a bank and my boss, Mrs. Newton, is both mean and crazy—a bad combination. When I first started there she said to me,

"Sue, dear, now that you're working perhaps you'll be able to buy some decent clothes."

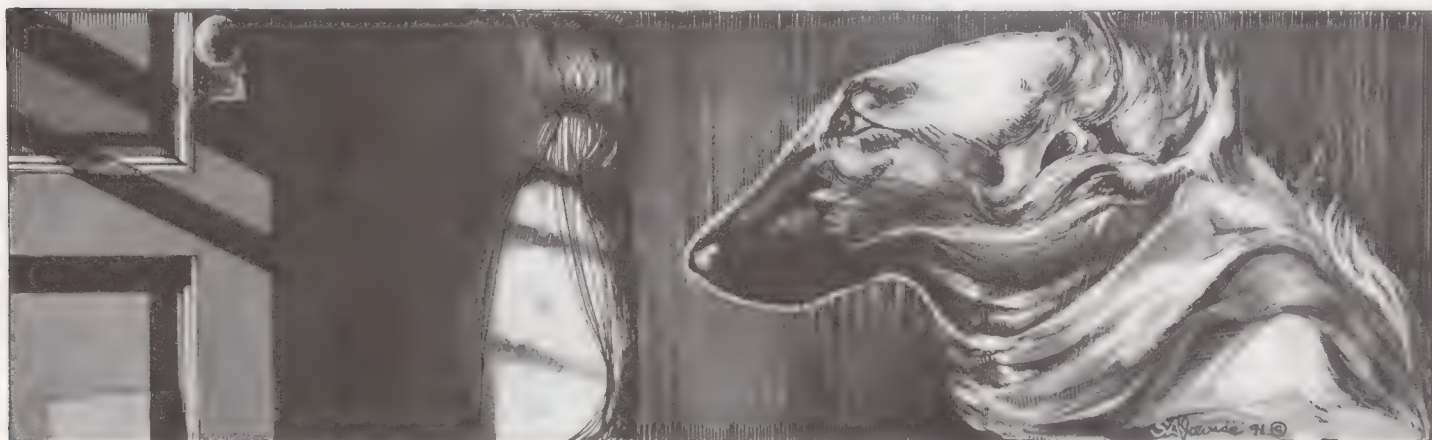
She told Linda, one of the tellers, "Dear, you have such a pretty face, now if you would lose thirty pounds." Don approached her with an idea for his department and Nasty Newton said, "Donald, please do your job and don't try and think," then went to her supervisor and passed the idea off as her own. She is as sweet as a summer morning to her superiors and mean as a wet day in winter to the underlings. If I had supernatural powers, I could get rid of her.

So I drove to my favorite place, the library, and browsed amid books titled, *So You Want To Be A Witch* and *Casting Spells For Fun And Profit*. Too frivolous. I needed a stronger, more powerful book. I didn't see what I wanted, so, as usual, I wandered about shelving the odd book

here and there. (The librarian, Barbara, runs the place virtually single-handed, but whenever I'm there I feel a powerful urge to tidy up the place.) That's when I saw it. I was shelving *Parakeets and Their Habits*, and wedged beneath the shelf lay a book the color of dun. The title had once been etched in gold. I opened it and read, *Magick*. I realized someone had hidden the book among the birds. I skimmed through it and saw why; it explained how to do magic. It was as simple as that.

I brought it up to the desk to check it out and Barbara looked startled. "I see you've found it." She looked at me. "Be careful, Sue, it works." If it really did work that would explain why our library was frequently the recipient of extremely large bequests.

As soon as I reached my apartment, I made myself a pot of jasmine tea,



Artwork by Shirley Jowise

plumped up the pillows on the couch, and settled in for a long read.

Next to the ancient names of herbs, someone had penciled in the modern names and the nursery that carried them. One of the spells required an animal sacrifice; next to it was a penciled notation saying, "I will never try this again."

In the section on giving an enemy boils, open sores, and head lice, there was a notation written at the bottom of the page—"Even in magic, what goes around, comes around." It reminded me of the time Barbara had the ulcerated foot. She'd been in the middle of a trying divorce. I believe her ex had developed boils in his ear at the same time.

In the section on chanting there was this note, "There is no substitute for chanting. Chanting is powerful. However, it must be done in a group to be effective."

I had a delicious weekend reading, and made up my mind to ask Linda and Don if they would be interested in joining me in spells, rituals, and incantations on a small scale.

On Monday morning, Linda, Don, and I were sipping coffee and munching donuts in the staff room when I said, in what I hoped was a casual voice, "I've been doing some reading in the occult."

Linda glanced at Don, then said, "I know, Sue. Barbara told us."

"The librarian?"

"Yes."

I couldn't figure it out. Why would Barbara tell Linda and Don about a book I was reading? She didn't even know them.

Linda noticed my puzzled expression. She said, "We have a small group that meets there every so often at the library."

"Oh, to plan the book sale and flea market?"

Linda didn't answer and looked at Don again. He said, "No. It's a Craft Group. We chant spells and concentrate on the practical aspects of witchcraft. Barbara said you might be interested."

I hesitated before I asked, "Clothes on and no praying to people I don't know?"

Don said, "This is a Craft Group. We're practical. We understand that the gods and goddesses are simply metaphors."

I smiled and said, "You're just the people I've been looking for."

That night I met the rest of the group in the basement of the library. There were six of us.

Barbara smiled and shook hands. "Welcome, Sue. I hope you feel comfortable here."

"Barbara, I feel like I've come home."

The Magick book I had checked out

was the group's reference work. According to it, spells could be cast for a number of reasons: to get rid of unwanted pests, to give an enemy warts, to find a true love, or to obtain the heart's desire.

The Craft Group settled down to business. Don's neighbor had a dog that barked all night long. The animal kept Don awake until the sun rose. That's when the dog finally fell asleep. Linda suggested the spell to get rid of unwanted pests but Don said, "No. It's obvious the dog is barking because he wants something or someone. Let's do the spell for granting him his heart's desire." I didn't say anything but I was disappointed. The only dog I wanted

to get rid of was Mrs. Newton. I chanted the rituals along with the rest but I was thinking, Mrs. Newton's the dog.

Two weeks later, Don came into work looking cheerful and well-rested. "The dog is gone."

"What happened?" I asked.

"He went off to college."

I laughed. "Don, that dog didn't even finish high school."

"I'm serious, Sue. My neighbor's daughter came home for spring break and took the dog back with her. He's now at Harvard."

Later on in my office, as I was telling Linda about the dog, the door was flung



Artwork by Shirley Jowise

open and Nasty Newton stormed in.

She said slowly and quietly, "Sue, will you tell me why you snuck out early yesterday?" Her voice rose. "And why you dumped those folders on my desk?"

I felt confused. "You gave me permission to leave early. Remember? I asked you on Monday. And the folders belong on your desk."

Mrs. Newton didn't seem to be listening. She cocked her head at a funny angle, let out a yelp, and left.

"What was that all about?" Linda asked.

"I haven't the foggiest. But we both know she doesn't have both oars in the water."

I sighed. The next meeting of the Craft Group was two weeks away and I realized that, as the newcomer, my problems were low on the list of their priorities. I vowed to make the best of things until I had my chance.

The next morning when I opened the door to the bank, Nasty Newton was there to greet me; in fact she shook hands with me—a first. I told Linda and she said, "She's been shaking hands with everyone who walks in the door. It's bizarre."

The next day when Mrs. Newton followed me around constantly, I had a glimmer of what was happening. Fascinated, I held my breath for the next development.

On Monday, Mrs. Newton pushed her desk under the sunny window in her office and curled up on the blotter to nap. She was the talk of the bank but her behavior did not surprise me. It left me numb but it did not surprise me. I prayed she wouldn't run out into the traffic and get hit by a car. She gave up driving her car and took a cab to and from work. She liked to stick her head out the window.

After two weeks of these antics, she announced she was retiring to a farm upstate where she would have the space to run. The relief I felt was so strong, I had to sit down.

The Craft Group still meets at the library, but now we plan the book sale and flea market.

KATE HOPPE was born in the Bronx, NY, but for the last twenty years has lived in a hamlet in upstate New York. She is still adjusting, she says.

She works in a library and reads, writes, draws, gardens, makes her own greeting cards, and collects angels.

SHIRLEY JOWISE lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

- Issue #1 (Summer 1988) – *Imagination and Reason* - Poul Anderson
The Skycastle - cover story by Bruce D. Arthurs; cover art by George Barr
The Final Bet - Marion Zimmer Bradley
Final Exam - Jennifer Roberson
- Issue #2 (Fall 1988) – *The Hitchhiker* - Jayge Carr
Was STARTLING STORIES the First Interactive Magazine? - Richard A. Lupoff
Bone Serai - cover story by Susan Schwartz; cover art by George Barr
- Issue #3 (Winter, 1989) *** WE FOUND A BUNCH OF THESE IN STORAGE
— THEY'RE NOT SOLD OUT AFTER ALL!!! NOT YET....***
The Adinkra Cloth (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge
Falling Apart - Larry Hodges
A Glassmaker's Courage - cover story by M. Coleman Easton and Phyllis Ann Karr; cover art by Frank Kelly Freas
Where the Myth and the Archetype Play - Julian May
- Issue #4 **SOLD OUT** (Really.)
- Issue #5 (Summer, 1989). "The Dragon Issue"
Do Virgins Taste Better? - Deborah Millitello
Dragon Three Two Niner - Peter L. Manly
The Dragon, the Unicorn and the Teddy Bear - Phyllis Ann Karr
Cover art by George Barr
- Issue #6 (Fall, 1989) – *Nightside* - Mercedes Lackey
Aventura - Jacqueline Lichtenberg
The Book of Souls - cover story by Jason Van Hollander; award-winning cover art by Frank Kelly Freas and Laura Brodian Kelly Freas
- Issue #7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea
Kill Dance - Mary A. Turzillo
The Hall of the Winter Folk - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher
Cover art by George Barr
- Issue #8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction-Fantasy" Issue
Change - Cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek
A Swim with a Shark - Robert Collins
Julio's Rock - Barbara Rosen
- Issue #9 (Summer 1990) "Short-Short" Issue
40 stories, PLUS articles! Short-shorts by Lackey, MZB, Paxson, Hodges, Schweitzer, Waters, Rosen, Huebner, and a host of others!
- Issue #10 (Fall 1990) – *A Dollar for your Soul* - Earl Vickers
Satanic, Versus... - Mercedes Lackey
What a Wizard Does - Janet Kagan
Vassilissa the Fair - Cover story by Micole Sudberg
Cover art by James Balkovek
- Issue #11 (Winter 1991) – *Brontharn* - Cover story and cover art by George Barr
Be It Ever So Humble - Tanya Huff
Footsteps - Marion Zimmer Bradley
The Robber Girl, the Sea Witch, and the Little Mermaid's Voice - Phyllis Ann Karr
- Issue #12 (Spring 1991) – *Haute-Clare* - Cover story by eliku bes shahar; cover art by Frank Kelly Freas
According To Custom - G.E. Gaines
Flight Of Fancy - Morgan Noel
On Solid Ground - Cindy Hughes

Get these back issues while they last! Enclose \$4.95 for each back issue, plus \$2.00 postage *per order* (NOT per issue!).

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and **make payable to** Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd. Send to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701.

The Jewel

by L.G. Hunt

When Scott opened his dad's safe deposit box to clear it out, he found it full of paper — stock certificates, bonds, titles, CD's — all paper that, in one way or another, stood for money, which itself was only paper that stood for — he didn't know what exactly. It seemed wrong to Scott that his dad, who had loved the physical world so much, the specific reality of fields and flowers, of woods, earth, and water, should now be memorialized only by such abstractions.

Crammed in the back of the box beneath everything else was a small tan envelope. It was different enough for Scott to stop his sorting and counting to open it. The envelope was the kind jewelers use, the kind with a flap at one end. Inside was a square of paper. Scott unfolded it and there was a large bright red jewel, perhaps eight or ten carats. He sighed; more — property. But at least the stone was prettier than the stocks and bonds. Then he noticed there was writing on the paper:

"Anyone who wanted things
Touched the jewel and they came;
We were wealthier than kings
Could we only do the same."
--A. Noyes

It was his dad's hand writing. He looked again at the stone. A ruby? If so, it must be worth a lot. But it was odd. His dad hadn't cared for jewelry. His mother's — she had been dead for years — had all gone to Scott's sisters. He read the verse

again and put his finger on the stone: "Health and happiness," he said softly. Nothing happened. He laughed, put the stone back in its envelope, and gathered up the papers.

Feeling foolish, Scott tapped on the lock of the jewelry store. The door buzzed, and he went in. He was relieved to see it was nearly empty — just a sleek young man with a plain pale girl looking at engagement rings.

"I'd like to get this appraised," Scott said to the dark man behind the counter, "but I don't know if it's even worth it." He held out the red stone in the palm of his hand.

The man, Arabic, perhaps Egyptian or even Pakistani — Scott couldn't tell — looked at it without touching.

"You want an appraisal for an appraisal," he said.

Scott smiled. "Something like that."

"What's it supposed to be?"

"Magic," Scott said.

The man raised his eyebrows. "Really? I don't know if we have the technology to test that."

He picked up the stone and peered at it through his loupe. "Just a minute," he said and walked to a work table and put the stone in a small dish of liquid. Then he took it out, dried it on a paper towel, and returned it to Scott.

"One hundred percent pure glass," he said. "But very pretty."

"Thanks," Scott said, reaching for his billfold.

"No charge," the man said. "I wasn't able to test its magical powers. What are they?"

"It's supposed to grant your wishes," Scott said. "Go ahead; try it if you like."

"How does it work?"

"Just touch it and wish."

The jeweler put his forefinger on the stone and shut his eyes.

"Death to the unfaithful," he said, grinning and showing white teeth.

At the other end of the store, the sleek young man slumped to the floor.

Several years later, Scott told the story to his friend Helen. They had known each other exactly a year, and they were celebrating their 'anniversary' over dinner at an Italian restaurant.

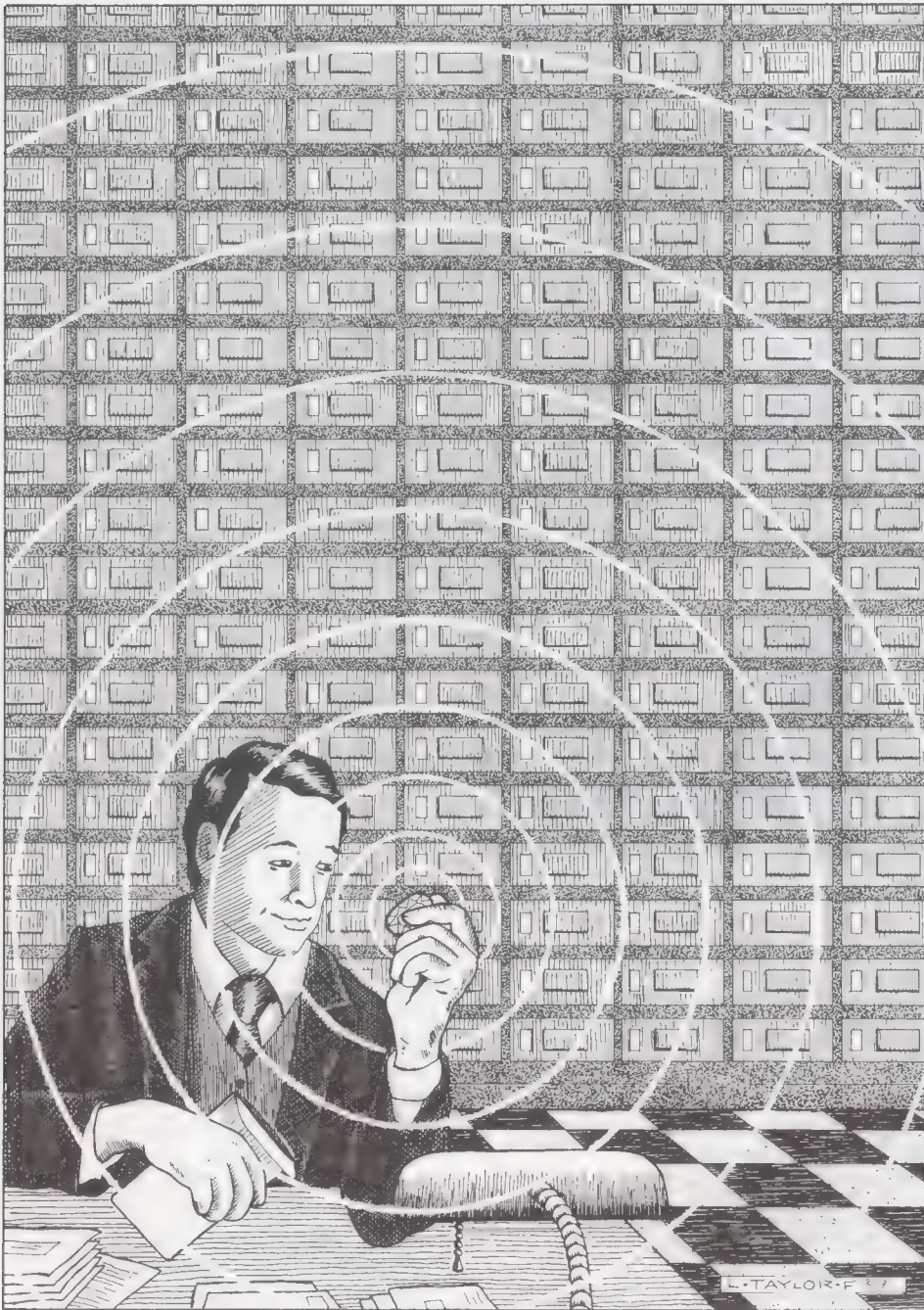
"The guy didn't actually die," Scott said. "He'd had a seizure — grand mal. He was an epileptic. But his timing was perfect. It really scared the jeweler."

The stone lay on the checkered tablecloth between them. It glittered redly in the soft light.

Helen smiled. "What did he do?"

"He called an ambulance, said he'd pay all the costs — his insurance covered it. I think he was worried I'd tell the girl what he'd done. I suppose that sort of thing would be bad for business."

"I wonder if the young man was 'unfaithful'," Helen said. "To the girl, I mean, though I suppose the jeweler meant unfaithful in the other sense of 'infidel' — 'unbeliever'."



"You don't have to say your wish out loud, do you?"

"I don't know. I guess not."

They finished their dinner and lingered over coffee. Scott wasn't sure how to proceed. Then he had an idea. He excused himself and went to talk to the proprietor. In a minute he came back with the pop top from a soda can. He took the stone and twisted the tab around it, making a crude ring. He took Helen's left hand and slipped the 'ring' onto her finger.

"This is the substitute until I get the real thing," he said. "Will you marry me? I'm normal and healthy, I have a good disposition, and I love you very much."

"Oh —," Helen began. "Oh, yes. How did I know —?"

"How did I know what?"

"Nothing —" She smiled and kissed his hand. "Please. Can I keep this for an engagement ring? We can get the stone set in another mounting."

"You mean you don't like this one?" Scott asked.

Scott was busy at the office when his secretary Sally called him to the phone. "It's a woman. She says she's sorry to bother you, but it's important. Wow!"

It was Helen. Her voice was low and flat.

"Scott, I'm at the jewelry store."

He was distracted; he didn't say anything.

"Scott, are you listening? It's a ruby. It's a real ruby. The jeweler says it worth — maybe half a million dollars."

Scott laughed. "You've got a good eye. Will it do for the engagement ring?"

"Scott, be serious. I can't take it. You had no idea what it was worth."

"What? Don't you think you're worth half a million?"

"Scott, I have to talk to you. There's something you don't know."

Scott met her at a pastry shop where they sometimes went for coffee. Helen was waiting for him at a table. Her eyes were large and round, like a beautiful frightened little girl, Scott thought. He could hardly bear seeing her look so unhappy and upset.

She sat very still.

"Scott, I've done something awful."

Her tone chilled him. She was going to leave him. There was someone else.

"The ruby —," she faltered, unable to continue.

"What?" he asked, taking her hand.

"I doubt if the stone is that good of a linguist," Scott said, laughing. "But I haven't told you the strangest part: after the ambulance was gone, the jeweler tried to buy the stone. He offered me a hundred dollars. For glass. It was almost as if he believed it had worked."

"Why didn't you sell it?" Helen said.

"It was dad's. It reminds me of him."

Helen looked at him. "You really loved your dad, didn't you?"

Scott nodded. "I did. He was awfully good to me. I hope I can do half as well."

"May I try it?" Helen asked, pointing to the stone.

At that precise moment, Scott knew

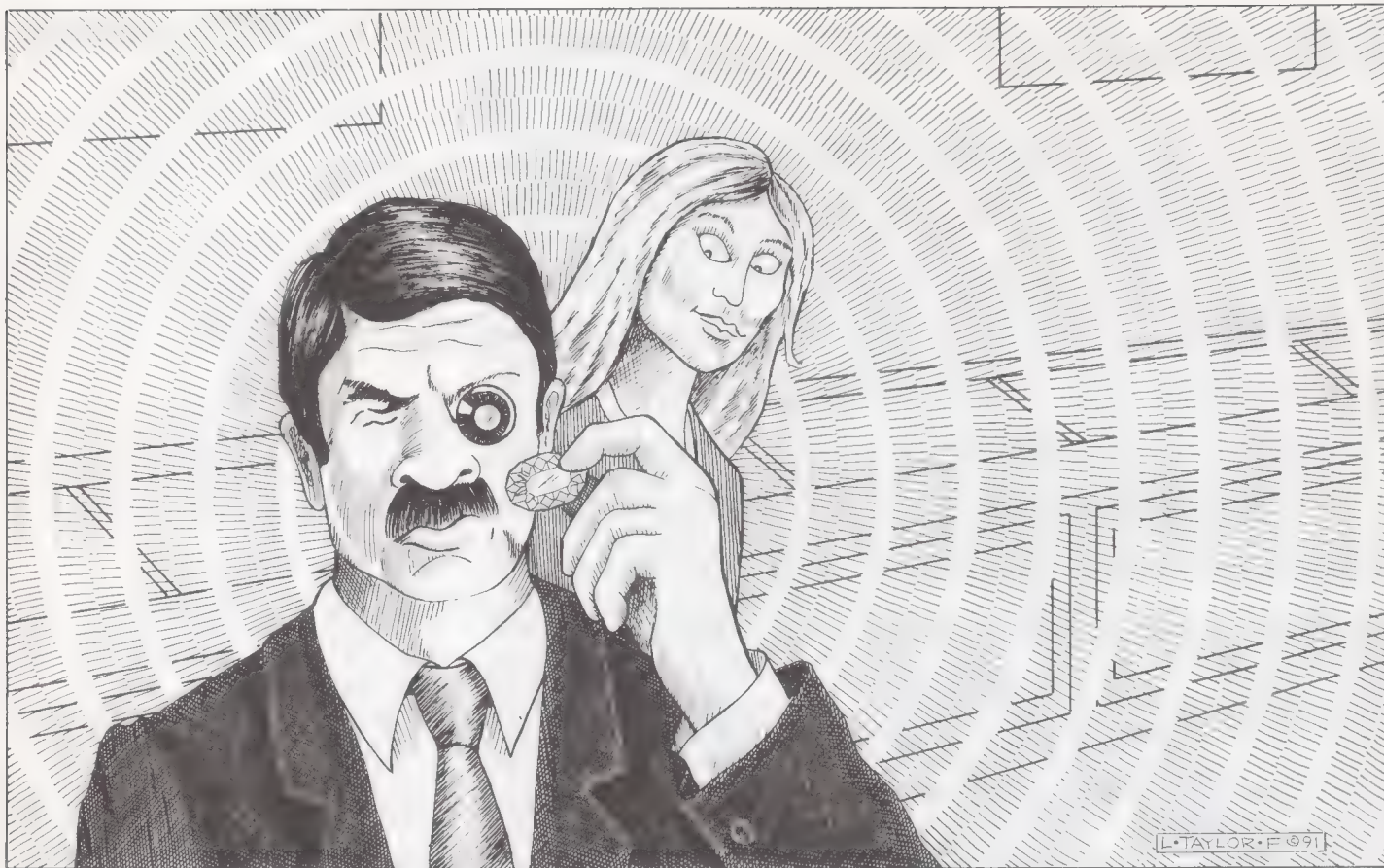
how much he loved her. It was the 'may' that got him. It seemed to stand for all the good things about her — her courtesy, her grace, the fact that she always thought of the other person before she spoke or acted. She understood a lot. She understood how Scott felt about his dad. Scott had never known a woman his age who was a person. They had always been women — dangerous, if fascinating — the adversary.

"Sure," he said.

Helen touched the stone, looked at Scott, and smiled.

"There!" she said.

"Well?" he said.



Artwork by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

"It works. It worked. I should have told you —."

"What do you mean, 'works'?"

"The wishing. Did you ever try it?"

"Of course not. Wait — yes, I did, once. When I first found it. I wished for health and happiness."

"Are you healthy and happy?"

"I was," he said. "Until now. Maybe I still am. Tell me if I'm still happy."

"When we were in the restaurant — you don't know what I wished for," she said.

He shook his head.

"I wished for what you did."

"Ask you to marry me?"

She nodded.

He squeezed her hand and smiled with relief. "Oh, that's it. Don't worry. I'd already decided to do it."

She frowned. "Something else. I wished you'd offer me the stone."

"Why? Why did you wish that?"

"Because it was precious to you. Because it had been your dad's. It meant something."

"But you thought it was glass —." Then it struck him. "No, I see. You knew it was real. You figured it out from the story about the jeweler. He knew it was real. He was trying to rip me off."

She shook her head. "No, no. You've

got it wrong. It was glass, but it was real all right. It really would grant your wishes."

"Come on. You don't believe that. You aren't serious."

"But I wished you'd ask me to marry you. Then I wished you'd give me the stone. And you did."

"Just a coincidence."

"Listen: When I took it to get it set, I thought how pretty it was. Too bad it wasn't a ruby. I wished that it was."

Scott stared at her.

"The jeweler looked at it, then he told me: 'The most perfect pigeon-blood ruby I've ever seen. It almost looks synthetic, except for one tiny flaw. Just enough to guarantee to anyone it's real.'"

Scott shook his head.

"I was frightened," Helen said. "I'd been so happy. Now this. It was too much. The thought of spending the rest of my life walking around with a — a time bomb on my finger. Sooner or later I'd wish for the wrong thing. It was too dangerous —."

Scott saw it coming. He was glad. It proved just how fine she was.

"Then I wished it wouldn't work anymore —"

L.G. HUNT sent in the following bio:

"L.G. Hunt is the pen name of a cybernetic author, herself the creation of a powerful computer program called PERSONA III. Based on the mathematical theory of applied personetics, PERSONA III takes an input story idea and simultaneously constructs *both* the story and the author who would have been most likely to have written it."

"According to PERSONA III, L.G. Hunt is a seventeen year old Ponapean woman, formerly married to a roughneck from Waxahatchie, TX, now living near Washington, DC, where she works as a part-time advisor to the National Security Council and a full-time origamist."

LYNNE TAYLOR-FAHNESTALK and her husband, Steve Fahnestalk, were the 1991 recipients of the Canadian Aurora Award for artistic achievement in the field of speculative fiction. Her artwork has been published in a number of U.S. and British magazines. They live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

For the last five years, she has been the co-owner of Northwest Fine Art Press, which specializes in limited edition prints, in addition to being art director for a printing firm and for two national outdoor magazines.

The Ogre Troll War

By V. L. Heppner

The rough wooden booth contained a table and two persons, three if one considered the imp-familiar with lemur-like eyes perched behind the Sorceress, four if one considered an ogre worth two persons.

Twyla, the youngest Sorceress in the sisterhood, sat daintily with her slender hands folded on a gnarled oak table. The table and booth had been quickly built at her request on a mountain-top. It still had a lingering, fresh-wood smell. Beside her right hand, directly in the sunlight, lay a purple-dyed reed: the badge of authority that proclaimed her the spokeswoman for the humans of the valley. The humans feared that their fertile valley would be destroyed by the opposing ogre and troll hosts that glowered at each other across the Berm River. A red gown clad her tender frame, while her black hair was wound cunningly around a blue clasp, the source of her power. She focused on the giant Ogre-King across from her.

"I refuse your request completely!" he bellowed, slapping a massive hand onto the table. The sound hurt her ears. Thick hairs sprouted from the back of his hand. Dirt was impacted beneath yellow fingernails. He smelled of old sweat.

Twyla scrunched her nose and averted her snow-white face from his foul breath. A moment later she slipped a mint into her mouth, then glanced up. The Ogre-King's face was three times the size of hers, hewn in heavy cuts: small eyes set too close, blunt nostrils with dark hairs

peeping out, and thick lips the color of spilled blood.

She asked quietly, "I crave your permission to speak one last time with the Troll-King."

He grunted. "Hurry! I weary of words. The time for clubs and grinding bones draws near."

"Of course," Twyla said, as she stood and wrapped a fox fur around her small shoulders. "Please permit me to add though, O King, that the Troll-King is eager to avoid a battle and come to terms."

The Ogre-King rudely spat onto the dirt floor. "Trolls are easily cowed. The mere fact of his asking for a parley shows this to be true."

"Agreed," she said smoothly. Making as if to leave, she suddenly paused and held up a single finger to her lips. Her features betrayed her hesitation.

"What?" he bellowed.

"If it pleases the King, may I ask Your Lordship for one small concession?" She hastily added while exchanging a side-glance with her imp, "Only, of course, if the Troll-King accepts your basic terms."

"A small concession?" he rumbled, frowning.

"The concession is so the Troll-King can save face. I'm sure you'll understand that, Your Majesty."

"Ha! And why should I care about that?" He pounded the table. "I demand that he cowers before me, and lies flat on his green belly and kisses my toes."

Twyla compressed her lips, then said slowly, "Consider your prestige among the warriors, Your Majesty, if you could cow the Troll-King through your blustering manner. The mere *threat* of your knotted club shall have made him quail. I'm sure that you would agree, that some of your warriors would be hurt, killed perhaps, in the midst of stout battle."

"Stout battle is to be hoped for," he said vigorously. "It builds mighty warriors."

"What of the dwarves to the west? If you take too many losses, will they still keep their treaty?"

"Bah!" Again he slapped his hand on the table. "Dwarves are ants to be crushed!"

"Maybe you're right." She glanced at her imp, then inhaled deeply. "I suppose nothing need be said about the Troll-King's magic axe, Ogre-Slayer."

"Agreed," the imp whispered, bobbing up and down on his perch.

"Magic axe?" the Ogre-King asked. He glanced from her to the imp, then back to her. "What's this about an axe?"

Twyla frowned while clapping her hand to her O-shaped mouth. In a trembling voice, she said, "Forgive me, O King, it was a slip of the tongue. You will not, I hope, take advantage of so young a Sorceress. Please, say nothing of this to your warriors. The Troll-King told it to me in secret. Well, I suppose that isn't true. He's boasted many times of his magic axe."



The Ogre-King scratched his leathery cheek, the sound loud in the small booth. He glanced down at his huge club. It wasn't magic. With a nod, he rumbled, "You're right. It's unfitting of a king to take foul advantage of one so young as you. I shall say nothing of his magic axe."

Twyla clapped her hands. "Thank you." She curtsied, then said in a soft voice, "Please, do not be angry with me for asking this once more, O King. I ask out of concern for the frail humans in the valley whose farms would be destroyed in your war. Would you consider one smaller concession to the Troll-King?"

He made a curt gesture. "What, uh, is this concession?"

"That the trolls be allowed water rights at the head of the Grons Mountain."

"Water rights?"

"Yes, O King. And to insure these rights, that you allow him to build a small fortress overlooking the headwaters."

"And in return?"

Twyla breathed deep, and said, "He agrees then, here in this booth — I will be your witness — to crawl on his belly and kiss your toes. Also, he will give free passage to all ogres over the Highland, Tepper, and Stonewall Bridges."

Big, dirty, heavy fingers tapped at the table. He studied her. Finally, "Whose army would be the first to leave?"

"I would think it a coup of honor for you if yours did."

He glanced sharply at her. "Mine?"

"He will have kissed your toes and given up toll rights to the main bridges, Your Majesty. Think about his humiliation. Your leaving first becomes an act of daring and a subtle insult. It says to all trolls: we so despise you, that we will let you cross the river freely."

The dirty fingers drummed louder. "The river barrier has prolonged the situation. Neither of us dares to cross in the face of the other."

Twyla nodded, her face calm and blank.

The Ogre-King glanced at his nonmagical club again. Finally he nodded. "Agreed. I will give the Troll-King these small, tiny in fact, concessions."

Twyla nodded gravely, and said to her imp, "I told you the Ogre-King was braver." She whistled and the small imp jumped to her shoulder. Together they stepped out of the booth.

The mountain wind blew cold, and

Artwork by Nicholas E. Jainschigg

smelled of the evergreens below. She drew the fox fur around her neck, feeling the soft texture, and trudged up the mountain. Brown lichen grew in the stony cracks; a black beetle scurried across it. She strode near the edge of the mountain in her slippered feet. Far below wound the thin Berm River. On the left side of the river waited the troll army, their sleeping holes looking like tiny anthills; on the right side of the river the ogres sat around giant camp fires. A mile from the enemy camps a thin plume of smoke curled up from a human hamlet, while still further away dot-like farmers plowed their fields. Twyla strode over the mountaintop and down towards a second booth waiting on the other side. By now she'd lost count of the number of times she had gone back and forth between booths. Both kings were quite stubborn.

"Your lies ran thick," the imp whispered into her ear. She felt his hot breath.

"Yes," she said.

"Is that right?"

"Perhaps not," she answered. "Yet too often lies and intrigue have started wars. I use these base tools to avert one."

"And some magic," the imp said impulsively.

"Yes, and some magic," she agreed.

"Let us see if it is yet possible to avert a war." She stepped up to the door and rapped thrice upon it.

"Enter," came the wet voice from within.

She opened the door, smelled the fishy odor, and stepped in. A large, ugly, greenish, misshapen humanoid sat at a table. Warts lay like hair on his head, his eyes were dots of black in liquid red, and his nose was a long icicle of green skin. The Troll-King's mouth was more like a knife slit in the lower part of his face.

"Well?" came his chilly voice.

She swallowed, sat at the edge of a chair, and said, "He agreed in principle to give up claim to the Grons Headwaters."

"The fortress, girl, did he give me rights to build a fortress?"

She nodded. "Though only if you allowed all ogres free passage over the Highland, Tepper, and Stonewall Bridges."

"What!"

"The Ogre-King knows that he asks much, Your Majesty, but hotheads push him to war. If you'll allow him the free passage, then he's agreed to leave the

Berm River barrier first."

The Troll-King blinked. "He did? He will back away first and show himself to be beaten down?" He shook his head. "I didn't believe even him to be such a craven coward."

Twyla shrugged. "Who can know the way of ogres?"

"Indeed. My thoughts exactly."

"Ah, but he does plan on bragging of what he gained."

The Troll-King waved that aside. "What do I care for words when all the world shall see that he caved in first? Yes. I agree to those terms. War is averted."

She stood. "Then, as treaty-maker, I suggest that you leave now. It is best to let the whipped Ogre-King slink away in shame."

The Troll-King stood, smiled, and said, "I shall do as you bid. Your services have been splendid." He shook his head again. "Who would think they would cow so easily? Amazing." He left, leaving a slimy stain on his chair, and headed down the mountain with his iron axe slung over his shoulder.

As Twyla stepped out of the booth, she composed herself for a major act of spell-casting.

"You will make a magical image of the Troll-King?" her imp asked.

"Yes. One to kiss the feet of the Ogre-

King."

"This is a grand deception, Twyla dear. I salute you."

"Thank you, little one, thank you."

"You are the master of lies." The imp giggled to itself.

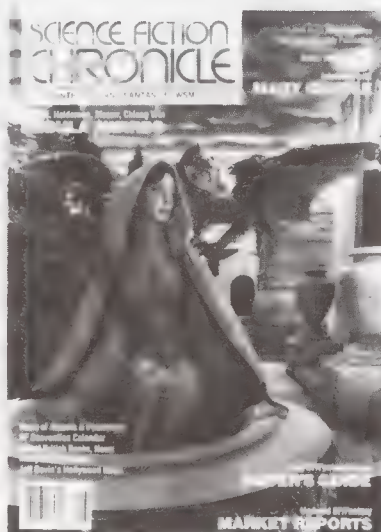
Twyla sighed, and told the imp, "I've been in battles — they are terrible things. What are a few lies if bloodshed is averted another day? Mayhap it will give thinking creatures a chance to find peace." She composed herself and began the enchantment.

V.L. HEPPNER spent his childhood reading Greek mythology, Andre Norton, and Edgar Rice Burroughs, and building snowforts in Saskatchewan, Canada. He now lives in California, where he is currently a high school teacher.

He says, "Between writing bouts I like to play basketball, elevate weights from one height to the next, and read voraciously. I am currently pet-less, but enjoy meeting the wandering cats that prowl through my back yard."

"The Ogre Troll War" is his first professional fiction sale.

NICHOLAS E. JAINSCHIGG lives in Brooklyn, NY, and has done numerous covers for books and magazines in the science fiction field. "It sure was fun," he commented on doing this illustration.



**10-Time Hugo Award
Nominee**
Now In Our 12th Year!

The News Comes First at



For subscription information, write:
Science Fiction Chronicle
Box 2730
Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056

Guardian

by Bunnie Bessel

"You are Hapt'sofere." Gibarra forced herself to ignore her exhaustion as she ran. She dodged a slick patch of moss, and winced as whip thin reeds slapped her already raw legs. Half her attention she gave to the unfamiliar ground she crossed. Half she gave to scanning the horizon, searching, desperately searching. She glanced nervously at the scarlet moon overhead, feeling as if she were racing against it. When it set, twin suns would crest the hills behind her. Her meager energy, she knew, would not sustain her through the heat of another day.

"A Hapt'sofere does not need sleep," she told herself fiercely. "A Hapt'sofere does not feel pain. A Hapt'sofere knows only duty."

Still, her legs quivered, muscles cramping with every step. Each breath was harsh and cold and seared her lungs. Her stomach, at least, no longer growled with hunger. Instead, a hard knot rapped painfully against her ribs as she moved.

She couldn't remember her last meal. Or her last night of sleep.

She remembered only deaths. So many deaths.

Over and over, her mind replayed them. First, Brithor, her Clan Lord, the only lord she'd served in her life. A shiver ran through her as she recalled the battle. She'd only turned her back on Brithor a few seconds, forcing away two attackers who would have overwhelmed him. Yet, when she turned back a dozen fighters separated her from her lord's side. As Gibarra watched, a Meglanar

clansman dodged inside Brithor's sword and stabbing him deep in his chest. Brithor crumbled to the ground, his blood flowing into the mud of the battlefield.

"No," Gibarra screamed. Across the field, her gaze met Brithor's. She saw surprise on his face, shock at his injury. Then his eyes dimmed and she felt his life leave him. "No!" she screamed again.

Recklessly, she fought her way toward him, slashing at anything in her path. She came upon the man who killed Brithor, and furiously slammed her sword against his, knocking his blade from his hands. As he staggered from the blow, she lunged forward, caught his neck and wrapped her fingers around his throat. She stared into his eyes, seeing him recognize who she was and what she had done. Then she waited, with tight grim lips, until she heard the satisfying snap of his neck.

Tossing the husk aside, she turned toward Brithor and almost fell to her knees. Someone had hacked Brithor's head from his shoulders. Gibarra straightened up and scanned the battle. She saw a Meglanar dirt soldier dragging the head by its golden braid through the mire of the field. She went after him, swearing to follow him into the enemy's camp, if necessary. But the battle turned against her and she lost sight of the man. By nightfall Brithor's clan was retreating in defeat.

She had failed. She, Hapt'sofere, guardian, had not prevented her lord's death, nor even ended his life cleanly with honor, as was her duty.

More deaths waited when she returned the headless body to the Clan Hold. Gibarra found five small bundles ready to join Brithor on his funeral pyre. Five. Three sons and two daughters. All dead of sickness in a matter of days. Their mother, Brithor's lady, lay in the birthing bed just having brought forth a new son. She, too, was flushed with the fever which had taken her children.

Within the last moon's turn, Gibarra's whole world had shattered around her, betraying her as her body betrayed her now. If her life had been her own, she would have lain down, cradled her head in moss, and invited death to close her mind.

But her life was not her own.

She belonged to the babe strapped across her shoulders. As long as his small heart beat, she was guardian and her duty clear.

Guardian. The very thought heated Gibarra's face with anger and shame. *What guardian was she?* Trained to be a warrior, to protect, to defend. Oh yes, she was skilled, very skilled. Sword, knife, bow, *k'tang*, rope spike, *morold*: all were weapons she wielded with deadly efficiency. No warrior dared face her in single combat. For they knew she saw the thoughts of her opponent, anticipated his moves and could kill him with a single blow. Or if she chose, lure him into the delicate *kor'tige*, the death hold, placing her hands precisely about his throat, so that if he struggled, even a little, he'd break his own neck.

"Hapt'sofere," she snorted in self-dis-



Artwork by Bruce Jensen

gust. Generations of breeding and a lifetime of training, but for what? Did her training save Brithor, or his lady, or his children? Could it save this one small baby, the last of Brithor's line?

Gibarra touched the babe's mind with her own. Life still resided there, small and determined. She felt a sense of wonder. The child's tenacity humbled her. His father had died before his birth, his mother died without even naming him, yet he clung to life.

As she ran, a rocky patch of ground caught her off guard. She stumbled, and almost lost her footing. Regaining her balance, she shoved a matted tangle of dark curls back from her face and mentally checked the child to be sure he was safe.

The baby's fierce will to survive, his unwillingness to accept death, had driven Gibarra out here into the desolate hills.

"It's the child's only hope," the Clan Healer had told her.

Gibarra had shaken the old man, cursed him for becoming ill before curing their lord's last son.

"Take him to the *Mir'trobain*," the healer told her through cracked, bleeding lips. "Their magic can save him. I cannot."

Gibarra had rocked back on her heels at the suggestion. The *Mir'trobain*. She heard stories of them all her life. Yet she knew so little. Sorcerers, wizards, witches, none knew exactly how to call them. They lived in stone towers and, if the stories could be believed, performed remarkable feats. Walking on air. Bringing gold from dirt. Defeating whole armies with the wind. Gibarra dismissed most of the tales as old men's yarns.

But some truth ran through them. The *Mir'trobain* were real enough. They dealt occasionally with the Clans. Usually to their own advantage. Gibarra had thought Brithor wise in refusing to deal with them.

But she had also been practical, and made a point years back of asking directions to the nearest *Mir'trobain* Temple. Legend placed one temple five days run into the hills north of the Clan Hold. But the stories were vague at best, and the northern hills rough and desolate. Gibarra had never taken the time to search out the place.

Cursing the healer again, she'd had gathered the child, wrapped him into a carrier and slung him over her shoulder. Even the impossible was better than watching her clan members, one by one, shrivel into death. Anything was better than standing by helpless while this baby died.

Now she regretted not looking for the

Temple earlier in her life. For three nights and two days she'd run across the hills and forest, searching for the fabled site. This baby, she knew, could not last much longer.

She paused as she came to the top of a hill. The red moon dipped toward the horizon, and behind her the first rays of sunlight touched the sky.

She'd lost the race. Hunched over, she drew in short painful breaths. Silently, she cursed all the years that brought her to this miserable failure.

The baby stirred in his carrier. As Gibarra glanced over her shoulder at him, she caught a glint in the distance. On a hilltop, hidden among the trees stood the Temple. Somehow she had made it.

Fighting against exhaustion, she forced her feet back into a shuffling trot and began the trek up the hill.

The Temple, a rounded dome, was of a dark stone so shiny it looked polished. Gibarra studied her reflection as she approached, assessing her condition. A tall woman with long, well-muscled arms and legs. Fur boots covered her foot to knee and a heavy leather tunic hung to mid-thigh. Padded armor protected her chest and back. A sword, knife, and small bow hung from her belt. Other weapons were hidden carefully within her clothing. Even as exhausted as she was, she knew she looked formidable and the thought strengthened her for the moment.

She circled the Temple, but found no entry in the smooth walls.

Finally, she stopped facing the shiny surface and announced, "I, Gibarra, Hapt'sofere of Brithor's clan, request an audience." Her feet were planted wide apart, head held high.

Minutes passed and nothing happened. Fear gnawed at Gibarra. She repeated her demand, louder this time, her words echoing off the hills behind the Temple. "I, Gibarra, *will* speak with you!"

Suddenly, the baby began to cry. The sound chilled Gibarra. He had not complained, nor even whimpered during the trip. She pulled him around and hugged him to her chest. His cries became howls and she rocked him in her arms, wanting to cry out with him. She scowled fiercely at the Temple.

"Brithor, Clan Lord, demands an audience!" she shouted. She unwrapped his bundling and held the naked baby out for them to see. She had no qualms at giving him his father's name. He deserved at least that much.

The words had barely left her lips when the side of the Temple blurred and be-

came an opening. Yellow light spilled onto the ground.

Gibarra frowned. A glamour. Yet she had not felt it as she circled the building. She was usually sensitive to such magic.

A woman stepped out. Tiny and old, she barely stood five feet tall. Her face was browned and mapped with wrinkles. Her brown hair, streaked with white, hung in a soft curve at her shoulders.

Behind her stood a thin, young man.

Gibarra mentally reached to touch their minds but only found a soft fuzziness. She pushed harder but could not gauge their thoughts or their magic.

The woman made a sign of formal greeting.

"The Lord Brithor is sick," Gibarra told the woman, before she could speak. "He needs your help to be healed." The words came slowly to her lips. Her head felt heavy, and the sky whirled above her.

"I am Raineer, Keeper of the Sanctuary," the woman said. "My regrets, Lady Gibarra, but we cannot —"

Gibarra's legs began to melt beneath her. Somehow she stumbled forward, shoving Brithor toward Raineer. She managed to keep hold of him until she felt the woman's hands wrap around the bundle. Then she let go and fell forward into darkness.

The thick smell of metal, oddly spiced cooking and sweat clogged Gibarra's nostrils when she woke. She wrinkled her nose and stared above her at a ceiling of soft gray that looked high above her head and yet oddly close enough to touch. Her body seemed reluctant to give up sleep. In fact, she found it almost impossible to lift even her hand. For the moment, she let it rest.

Raineer and the man were talking—arguing off to one side of Gibarra.

"You can't do this, Raineer," the man said, his voice shrill. "The Council will never approve. You go too far."

"There is nothing else I can do, Neville."

Gibarra heard a strained weariness in the woman's voice, as though the argument had been going on for a while.

"You know the laws," Neville continued. "No contact with the Clans. Saving this baby could upset the designs of the Council."

"Neville," Raineer scoffed. "The woman was laying face down in the dirt. Did you expect me to let her die out there?"

"You never should have opened the door."

"I have passed the Third Level in the Way of Learning," Raineer said, a cool

superiority coming to her voice. "I think I am sufficiently qualified to make this decision without the help of an initiate-trainee."

"I'll never get initiated," Neville growled, "when the Council learns of this."

"I will not listen to a baby cry outside my door and do nothing about it," Raineer said. "And I'll make it very clear to the Council that *you* had nothing to do with the decision."

Gibarra reached mentally past them searching for Brithor. She touched him and knew instantly that something was wrong, very wrong. Only the tiniest flicker of life flowed through his veins. Beneath his life force, something foreign trickled, something that Gibarra had never felt before.

"What have you done to Brithor?" she demanded, struggling to sit up. The room spun around her but she forced her feet to the ground.

"Lady, you shouldn't be up," Raineer told her. She caught Gibarra's arm and tried to push her back down. "You're far too weak —"

Gibarra's fist knotted as she fought against her automatic reaction. No one touched a Hapt'sofere. Roughly, she pulled out of the woman's grasp. "Where is my lord?"

"Don't worry, Lady, he is taken care of," Raineer said. "But you need rest."

"Where is he?" Gibarra demanded again.

"Listen to me for a moment," Raineer said. "I did not have the — the magic — in this Sanctuary to help your lord. I did the only thing I could do. I gave him into a sleep. He will stay there, resting until others, others with stronger healing magic, come. They will wake him and make him well."

Gibarra knew the woman was changing words, speaking simply for her benefit. Still, what she said made little sense. Again, Gibarra tried to touch Raineer's mind hoping to find some inkling of the truth. Concentrating hard, she caught shadows of thoughts. The woman was not lying, but there was untruth there which Gibarra could not identify. "He is only sleeping?" she questioned directly.

"A very long sleep," Neville replied curtly.

"Neville." Raineer shot him a warning glance.

Gibarra stared at the man. His eyes were a dark brown bordering on black. Gibarra touched anger in his mind. Anger at her for being here. Anger at Raineer for putting Brithor to sleep.

"The baby is sleeping, Gibarra," Raineer said carefully. "A special kind of sleep, but just sleep."

"Where is he?"

Raineer waved her across the room.

On a slab with a rounded lid of clear crystal, she saw Brithor. His arms and legs were drawn in close to his body, making him look very tiny in the big space. Reaching to his mind, she shivered at the fragile life-force that ran within him. She did not understand this sleep.

But the Clan Healer had said *Mir'trobain* magic could save Brithor. If sleep would make her lord well, she would accept it. "When he wakes up your people will heal him?" she asked Raineer again.

"If they allow him to wake," Neville said.

"Neville!" Raineer snapped.

"What do you mean?" Gibarra demanded.

"She has the right to know the risks, Raineer," Neville said, and continued quickly to Gibarra. "I mean that saving this — your lord — may not please the Council. It may not be in their plans. They may choose not to wake him up for a few hundred years, if at —"

"A few hundred years?" Gibarra glared at Raineer. "No one sleeps for a hundred years."

"Neville! Not another word out of you," Raineer ordered. "And I mean it." She leaned forward to touch Gibarra's hand.

Snapping her hand away, Gibarra stepped back from the woman. "Do not



Artwork by Bruce Jensen

touch me again," she warned softly.

Raineer looked at her with surprise in her eyes. Then she nodded and stepped back. "I apologize, Lady, I forgot you were Hapt'sofere."

The statement made Gibarra uneasy. How much did Raineer know of Clan ways? Gibarra knew little about the *Mir'trobain*. She didn't like the disadvantage.

"I told you this sleep is special," Raineer said. "It is old magic. Very old magic. I could wake up your lord now, or tomorrow, or a week, or a year from now. And he would be exactly as you last saw him, the same age, the same baby. The same very sick little boy."

"Or in a hundred years?" Gibarra prompted her.

"Ten years, a hundred years, a thousand. Time has no meaning to this magic," Raineer said carefully. "But, Hapt'sofere, the Council will not let him sleep that long. They will —"

Fear like a storm raged inside Gibarra. She barely heard Raineer's words. This magic was too strong! Turning with a quick sure movement, she caught Neville and jerked him into her grasp. He was weak as a slough worm. She felt no warrior's muscle in his limbs. For that, she was grateful. She wasn't strong enough to put up with much of a fight at the moment. But he gave her no fight at all. With a shout, he tumbled clumsily into her hold. She wrapped one arm around his waist, then slid her other hand delicately up his throat.

"Let me go," he croaked.

"Neville!" Raineer's voice overrode him. "Be still. Perfectly still."

The panic in her tone must have gotten through to the man. He stiffened in Gibarra's grasp.

"That is the *kor'tige*, the death hold," Raineer warned Neville. "Do you remember me telling you about it? Don't nod! Don't move at all."

The man made a soft squeaking sound in the base of his throat.

Raineer stood in front of Gibarra with her arms hanging limply at her sides. "What are you doing this?" she asked. "I'm trying to help you."

"Who will be there when my lord wakes?"

"My people," she said hesitantly. "The Council."

"And Meglanar's Clan?" Gibarra asked. She would never allow Brithor to fall into the hands of his father's murderers.

"Of course not."

"Are you sure?"

"Gibarra, my people have no reason to tell the other Clans about this," Raineer said. "In fact, I imagine they'll prefer that the Clans do not know."

"And in a hundred years?" Gibarra insisted. "Who will be there then?"

"I don't know. The Council, the same people. But it won't be a hundred years."

"Will the Clans be there then?"

"I don't know. That's a long time. They shouldn't be."

"Can you swear that the other Clans will not be there when my lord wakes?"

"There isn't any reason —"

"Can you swear?" Gibarra demanded.

"No."

They glared across the room at each other for several seconds, the only sound Neville's harsh wheezing breaths.

"I am Hapt'sofere," Gibarra said. "It is my duty to protect the life of my Clan Lord. If I cannot protect his life, it is my duty to offer him death, honorably, not at the hands of his enemies."

"Gibarra, if you take that baby out of sleep now, he will have no life at all," Raineer replied. "Give him a chance. Trust me. I will talk to the Council. Don't condemn him."

"I am Hapt'sofere," Gibarra said again. "Only I can decide his life." Or his death, she added to herself. What should she do? This baby fought so hard for life. She did not want to give him up now. But to send him ahead a day, a year, a hundred years into a world she did not know, unprotected. That went against every tenet of her guardianship.

The silence hung between them, as Gibarra searched her mind for a solution. Finally, she decided. She loosened her hold on Neville slightly, knowing he would not move until she released him. To Raineer, she said, "You will do exactly as I say."

Brithor's small, naked body felt cold and lifeless as Gibarra settled him into the crook of her arm. She looked down at him and gently brushed the soft, blonde fuzz of his hair with her fingertip. With infinite tenderness she wrapped her hands around his neck. He was almost too tiny for her to grip.

"What are you doing?" Raineer asked.

Gibarra glanced up at the woman as her fingers curled into the familiar pattern at the baby's throat. "You know the *kor'tige*. Tell your Council to wake me first. If they try to wake Lord Brithor within my grasp, if he moves, he will most certainly die. I must wake first. I will see who is

waiting when he wakes and I will decide if Lord Brithor should come back from this sleep."

She settled back on the slab. It had been so large for Brithor, but it was almost too small for her. She had to bend her knees to fit. "You will tell them?" she asked Raineer.

"Yes," the old woman said.

"Good. We are ready to sleep."

"Hapt'sofere," Raineer said softly, "Your blood is strong. You have done your duty."

Gibarra looked up at the woman, surprised and pleased that she knew the traditional salute of Clan Lord to Hapt'sofere. She nodded and closed her eyes to sleep.

BUNNIE BESSEL grew up in the vast open spaces of South Texas where an active imagination was vital to survival. Stories and story telling have always been a part of her life. She now lives in Arlington, Texas with: Steve, a supportive husband; Hildegard and Gertrude, two golden retrievers; and a horse named Stoney.

BRUCE JENSEN is a young artist lives in Woodside, New York. He has shown artwork at various science fiction conventions, including the recent World Con in Chicago.

Membership in ASFA, the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists, the group which gives out the Chesley Awards, is open to anyone. It costs \$18.00 a year, payable to ASFA, P.O. Box 151442, Arlington TX 76015-7442, and includes their (beautiful) quarterly newsletter.

The Friends of Darkover wish it to be known that the Darkover Newsletter, a quarterly, is available for the sum of \$7.00 annually in the U.S., \$10.00 per annum in Canada, or \$17.00 foreign. Payment must be either a check in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank or a postal money order in U.S. dollars, payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.

The Friends of Darkover is a non-profit, non-dues-paying, disappointed, unmustered group representing the span from the golden season to the golden years, and from the golden mean to the gilded extreme.

The Last Word

Well, neither Marion nor I was burned out or even evacuated on October 20, but we both prepared for the worst. The fire seemed a bit like a volcano as the red burned downward from the hills, closer to us. Especially after dark, when we could see flames that probably rose six to eight stories in the air, it looked like any definition I'd ever read of hell. I still have dreams that I am going through the house, trying to select which items to take and which to consign to the possibility of destruction. One night, I transformed this search into a dream that I was living in Lebanon and trying to help a friend leave the country. I suppose this is how fiction begins: the transmutation of significant emotional events into art. However the process works, I salute those of you who write and those who appreciate fine writing.

You may be wondering what happened to the wonderful Dawn Hardin story I promised you for this issue. Dawn Hardin has changed her name to Dawn Albright, so the story is here after all. We hope you enjoyed "Black Ribbon".

The next issue will be unusual: it will be the first for this magazine where the cover does not highlight a story but rather an interview. The cover for issue #15 will be our tribute to Fritz Leiber, Nebula Grand Master of fantasy fiction, and to his lifelong friendship with Harry Fischer. Fritz's "Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser" stories were about himself and Harry, doing the noble deeds they KNEW two good friends could do. I was fortunate enough to

persuade David Cherry to paint the Leiber cover for us, and *Locus* obligingly provided the photos on which David's pictures of Fritz and Harry were based.

There *will* still be fiction in issue #15, never fear. Marion has not confirmed the lineup, but we have bought some sad, romantic stories, including one by Alethea Eason and one by Mary Frey; we have another humorous story from G.E. Gaines and one by Thomas D. Sadler; we have good stories by Shymala Dason, Isabel Cole, Margarita Serbia, Lynne Armstrong-Jones, John Buentello, Lyn McConchie, and Roger A. Russell (to name some of the talented writers you'll meet).

If you'd like to help us increase our readership, there is a way. I'd like to see *MZB's FM* in as many bookstores as possible. If you will send me the names of any likely local stores - specialty science fiction stores, game stores or comic stores which have some interest in fantasy, general bookstores with sf sections - I will contact them and try to talk them into carrying the magazine. You could send me photocopies of the bookstore yellow pages listing for your town, with marks to indicate the stores which might be interested. There is no reward, but you will have my appreciation for your assistance.

It will be past the year-end before another issue comes out, so I wish you all a happy holiday season and peace for the new year.

— Rachel Holmen

Isn't It Time For Some New Friends?

You've outgrown Hansel and Gretel, but the world of faery, magic, and dreams still fascinates you. There's a magazine just for you: Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*. Marion handpicks each story to entertain and amuse you. You'll meet wizards and dragons, maids and magical cats, travel to faraway places and distant times.

Each issue features excellent fiction, beautifully illustrated and handsomely produced on quality paper – a real collectors' item in the making. We also have two columns especially for authors, "A Writer Looks at Writing" and "Writers Talk Back".

Postage rates have gone up, until January 1, U.S. subscription rates remain the same as they were when the magazine started: \$14.00 per year. Canadian subs are \$20.00 (payable in U.S. funds); overseas subscriptions are \$30.00. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Please make checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ltd.

☐ Yes, I'm enclosing payment for the next four issues. Start my new subscription with the current issue.

☐ I don't want to miss any back issues, so here's my order for them as well.

Please send me issues:

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14

for \$4.95 each plus \$2.50 per order for postage. (Sorry; #4 is sold out.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____



**Marion Zimmer Bradley's
FANTASY Magazine
Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701**

The Cauldron — Issue #14

Story

- ☐ Black Ribbon by Dawn Albright
- ☐ The Promise by Diana M. McCabe
- ☐ Frog Kiss by Kevin J. Anderson
- ☐ The Tengu's Scroll by Dana Kramer-Rolls
- ☐ The Wuzzles by Marion Zimmer Bradley
- ☐ Dragon's Lair by Stephanie Shaver & Ronald Pisano
- ☐ Heartleaf by Susan Hanniford Crowley
- ☐ Stand By Me by Glen & Connie Ten-Eyck
- ☐ The Frog Prince by Marella Sands
- ☐ Twenty Peasants by Barton Paul Levenson
- ☐ Witchcraft, Wicked Witchcraft by Kate Hoppe
- ☐ The Jewel by L.G. Hunt
- ☐ The Ogre Troll Wars by V.L. Heppner
- ☐ Guardian by Bunnie Bessel

Artist

- ☐ Gail Butler
- ☐ Alan Gutierrez
- ☐ George Barr
- ☐ Alicia Austin
- ☐ Hannah M.G. Shapero
- ☐ Vincent Di Fate
- ☐ Rob Alexander
- ☐ Gus diZerega
- ☐ Margaret Organ-Kean
- ☐ Shirley Jowise
- ☐ Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk
- ☐ Nicholas E. Jainschigg
- ☐ Bruce Jensen

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine,
or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter.

Want a subscription? An
order blank is on page
63. A back issue order
form is on page 51.

New from DAW Books!

BLACK SUN RISING by C. S. Friedman

On the planet Erna, humans have achieved an uneasy stalemate with the *fae*, a terrifying natural force with the power to give life to people's nightmare images or treasured dreams, little realizing that the demonic *fae* are rapidly gaining in strength. And as these dark *fae* multiply, four people are drawn together for a mission that will force them to confront an evil beyond imagining.

0-88677-485-3 Fantasy/Original Hardcover \$18.95 (\$24.99 in Canada) Nov. '91

LERONI OF DARKOVER edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley

All-new stories that reveal legendry and lore about the most fascinating dwellers on Darkover, those gifted with *laran*, magical powers of the mind which enable the *leroni* to raise and control natural forces, to communicate over vast distances, and to exercise countless other special abilities.

0-88677-494-2 Fantasy/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Nov. '91

HORSE FANTASTIC edited by Martin H. Greenberg & Rosalind M. Greenberg

Let these steeds carry you off to adventure and enchantment as they race, swift as the wind, to the magic lands. You'll meet a devilish horse who just might make your wishes come true... a ghostly creature whom even death couldn't keep from the winner's circle... and a herd of other wonderful horses who will take you for a whirlwind gallop into new worlds of fantasy.

0-88677-504-3 Fantasy/Original Anthology \$4.50 (\$5.99 in Canada) Dec. '91

WILD MAGIC (Wild Magic #1) by Jo Clayton

Return to the universe of the *Drinker of Souls* and explore a whole new domain in this enchanted world where rival gods vie for mastery by manipulating both the forces of nature and their own devoted worshipers. As young Faan, goddess-chosen, takes her first steps down the pathway to power, other gods' followers are preparing a devastating strike at the very heart of her world.

0-88677-496-9 Fantasy/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Dec. '91

THE LAST OF THE RENSHAI (Renshai #1) by Mickey Zucker Reichert

The Renshai—the mightiest, most hated and feared of all warrior races. When their enemies band together in a surprise attack, one Renshai warrior escapes, determined to keep the memory of his people alive and to claim his vengeance on the slayers of his race. But he is destined to walk the pathways of prophecy, and may be doomed to become the Champion of the Great War....

0-88677-503-5 Fantasy/Original \$5.99 (\$6.99 in Canada) Jan. '92

TWO-BIT HEROES (Gate of Ivory #2) by Doris Egan

Drawn back to Ivory by her fascination with a world where magic not science holds sway, Theodora embarks with Sorcerer Ran on a mission into a province plagued by outlaws, where Ran is mistaken for the leader of a dangerous band long sought by the local law officers. Pursued by government forces, Ran and Theodora run for their lives—straight into the clutches of the outlaws!

0-88677-500-0 SF/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Jan. '92

THE DRAGON TOKEN (Dragon Star #2) by Melanie Rawn

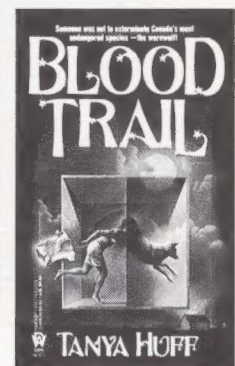
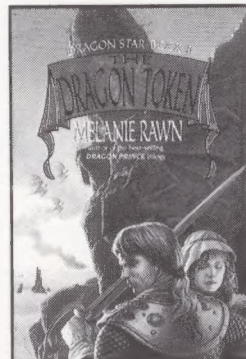
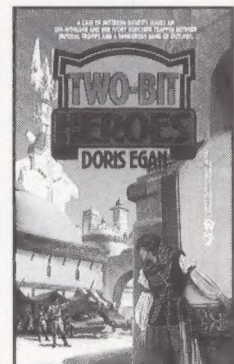
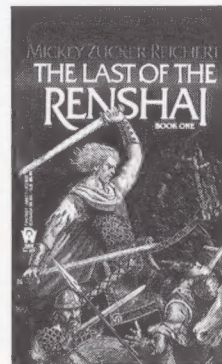
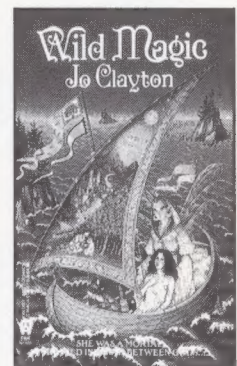
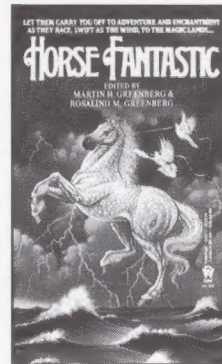
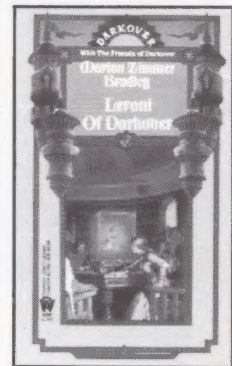
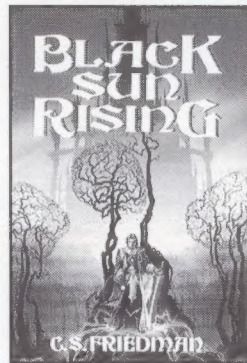
The flames of war continue to blaze across the land, the time for retreat has ended, and Prince Pol must rally his forces to halt the invaders' advance. But the invaders, too, have an agenda and they are readying a strike at the very heart of the Desert, stealing treasures which both Andry and Pol would pay any price to reclaim—even if the price should prove to be their own lives....

0-88677-493-4 Fantasy/Original \$20.00 (\$25.99 in Canada) Feb. '92

BLOOD TRAIL (Blood Price #2) by Tanya Huff

Only Henry Fitzroy, a Toronto-based vampire and writer of bodice rippers, and Vicki Nelson, ex-policewoman and now a private investigator, could save Canada's most endangered species—werewolves. But could even their combined talents prove enough to trace the blood trail of destruction to its source before it was too late?

0-88677-502-7 Fantasy/Original \$4.50 (\$4.99 in Canada) Feb. '92



DAW Books, Inc.

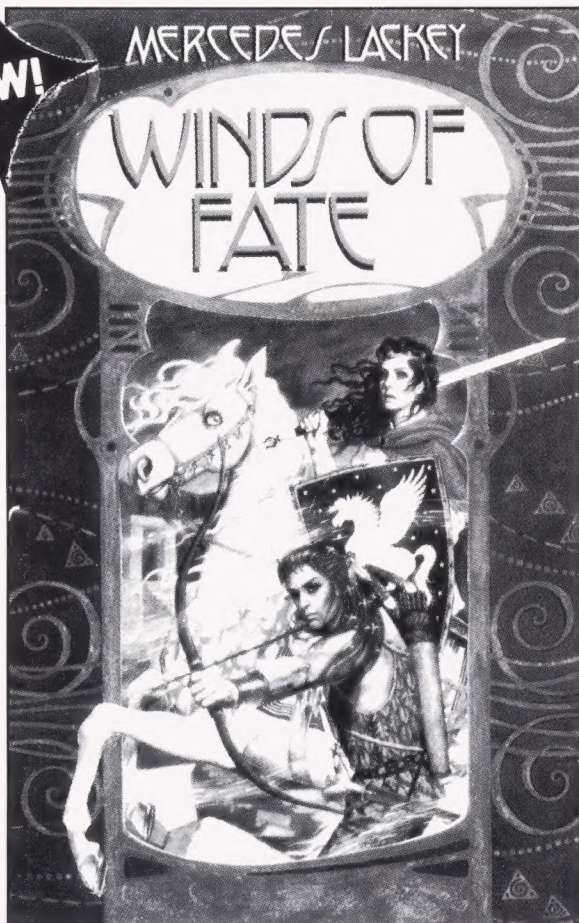
For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Distributed by PENGUIN USA

A DAW HARDCOVER

**Could Herald Elspeth, heir to Valdemar's throne,
save her kingdom
from conquest by
sorcery?**

NEW!



Book One of The Mage Winds

WINDS OF FATE

Mercedes Lackey

DAW Fantasy /Original
0-88677-489-6/\$18.95 (\$24.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds
of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

OCTOBER 1991

Best-selling fantasy author Mercedes Lackey first began ensorcelling readers with the publication of her *Heralds of Valdemar* trilogy, which brought to life the kingdom of Valdemar. This enchanted land is protected by the Heralds—men and women gifted with extraordinary mind powers and paired with wondrous Companions, horselike beings who know of the many perils and possibilities of magic. Only the Companions truly remember the long-ago age when high magic was lost to Valdemar as the last Herald-Mage gave his life to save the kingdom from destruction by dark sorceries.

Yet now the realm is at risk again, for Ancar of Hardorn will use every weapon at his command to conquer Valdemar. And it is Elspeth, Herald and heir to the throne, who must take up Ancar's challenge, abandoning her home to find a mentor who can awaken her untrained mage abilities. But even as Elspeth sets out in search of the forgotten magic that could prove to be Valdemar's best hope, others, too, are being caught up in a war against sorcerous evil. The Tayledras scout Darkwind is the first to stumble across the menace that is creeping forth from the uncleansed lands. And as sorcery begins to take its toll among his comrades, Darkwind may find himself forced to call upon powers he has sworn never to use again if he and his people are to survive the onslaught of an enemy able to wreak greater devastation with spells of destruction than with swords....

- Magnificent jacket art by Jody A. Lee
- Fully illustrated by artist Larry Dixon

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014